This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

AH 4WGM F

Harvard Depository
Brittle Book

Digitized by Google

872
Eyton

Andover Theological Seminary

ANDOVER-HARVARD THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY

MDCCCCX

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# THE TRUE LIFE

## AND OTHER SERMONS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# THE TRUE LIFE

## *AND OTHER SERMONS*

PREACHED FOR THE MOST PART AT

HOLY TRINITY, UPPER CHELSEA

BY

ROBERT EYTON

RECTOR OF UPPER CHELSEA, PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S
SUB-ALMONER TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

LONDON
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE
1889

Digitized by Google

ANDOVER-HARVARD
THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
A76.993
May 11, 1939

(*The rights of translation and of reproduction are reserved.*)

Digitized by Google

TO THE DEAR MEMORY OF

MY FATHER.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# PREFACE.

THESE Sermons are published in deference to the wishes of many who heard them, and asked for them in a more permanent form.

The writer is deeply conscious of the fact that he owes much to the thoughts of others. Wherever it has been possible for him to trace his obligations he has expressed them in a note, but as some of these sermons were re-written from earlier ones on the same text, which were composed many years ago, it is quite possible that he may not have always succeeded in doing so. Of these Sermons, two were preached in his turns as Select Preacher before the University of Oxford, from 1887–1889;* two in St. Paul's Cathedral—one in his turn as Prebendary, the other by the nomination of the Dean;† one as

* Sermons xiv. and xxxi. † Sermons xxiii. and xxxiii.

Digitized by Google

Sub-Almoner in the Chapel Royal, St. James;* one on the Festival at St. Mark's College, Chelsea;† and the remainder in Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Street, between October, 1884, and July, 1888, when the church was pulled down. The concluding sermon in the book was preached on the last Sunday in which the congregation worshipped in the old building.

* Sermon xiii. † Sermon xviii.

Digitized by Google

# CONTENTS.


I.

THE MAINTENANCE OF THE TRUE LIFE.

*First Sunday in Lent*, 1887.

PAGE

"Jesus answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."—ST. MATT. iv. 4. ... ... ... 1

II.

THE GREAT DANGER OF THE TRUE LIFE.

*Second Sunday in Lent*, 1887.

"Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."—ST. MATT. iv. 7 ... ... ... 14

III.

THE SAFEGUARD OF THE TRUE LIFE.

*Third Sunday in Lent*, 1887.

"Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."—ST. MATT. iv. 10 ... ... ... 28


Digitized by Google

IV.

THE ATONEMENT.

*Fifth Sunday in Lent*, 1888.

PAGE

"Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness."—1 ST. PETER ii. 24 ... ... ... ... ... 49

V.

THE EXPEDIENCY OF CHRIST'S ASCENSION.

*Ascension Day*, 1886.

"It is expedient for you that I go away."—ST. JOHN xvi. 7 ... 61

VI.

SORROW AND JOY.

*First Sunday in Lent*, 1886.

"Sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing."—2 COR. vi. 10 ... ... 70

VII.

THE COURAGE OF THE SAINTS.

*Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity*, 1887.

"That I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."—EPH. vi. 20 ... 80

VIII.

THE CHILDHOOD OF CHRIST.

*Second Sunday after the Epiphany*, 1885.

"And the Child grew, and waxed strong in spirit."—ST. LUKE ii. 40 ... ... ... ... ... ... 93

Digitized by Google

IX.

THE REAL MEANING OF SUFFERING.

*Hospital Sunday*, 1887.

PAGE

"And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man that was blind from his birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."—ST. JOHN ix. 1–3 ... ... ... ... ... 108

X.

THE ENDURING MEAT.

*A Harvest Sermon. Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity*, 1887.

"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you."—ST. JOHN vi. 27 ... ... ... 119

XI.

THE INVASION OF EVIL, AND ITS RESULTS.

*Sexagesima Sunday*, 1888.

"O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end."—Ps. ix. 6 ... ... ... ... ... ... 133

XII.

CHRIST THE REVEALER OF THE FATHER.

*Sunday after Ascension Day*, 1888.

"O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have declared unto them Thy Name."—ST. JOHN xvii. 25, 26 ... ... ... ... ... ... 148

Digitized by Google

XIII.

THE HOLY GHOST THE REVEALER OF THE SON.

*Chapel Royal, St. James', Whitsunday*, 1888.

PAGE

"When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all Truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come."—ST. JOHN xvi. 13 ... ... ... 162

XIV.

THE GUIDANCE OF RELIGIOUS EMOTION.

*Preached before the University of Oxford, May* 6, 1888.

"Jesus saith unto her, Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God."—ST. JOHN xx. 17 ... ... ... 171

XV.

THE INCOMPLETENESS OF REVELATION.

*Trinity Sunday*, 1888.

"We know in part."—1 COR. xiii. 9 ... ... ... 184

XVI.

CHRIST'S WORDS.

*Twentieth Sunday after Trinity*, 1886.

"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."—ST. JOHN vi. 63 ... ... ... ... 196

Digitized by Google

XVII.

THE CHRISTIAN MOTIVE.

*Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity*, 1886.

PAGE

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."—1 ST. JOHN iii. 2, 3. ... ... ... 207

XVIII.

LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE.

*Preached at St. Mark's College, St. Mark's Day*, 1888.

"Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth."—1 COR. viii. 1 ... 219

XIX.

THE BANE OF LITERALISM.

*Second Sunday after Trinity*, 1888.

"The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."—2 COR. iii. 6 ... 235

XX.

SUNDAY.

*Fifth Sunday after Trinity*, 1888.

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it."—ROM. xiv. 5, 6 ... ... ... 249

Digitized by Google

XXI.

CHRISTIANITY AND LIBERTY.

*Eighth Sunday after Trinity*, 1888.

PAGE

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."—2 COR. iii. 17 ... ... ... ... ... ... 267

XXII.

THE SIFTING OF PETER.

*St. Peter's Day*, 1887.

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."—LUKE xxii. 31, 32 ... ... 281

XXIII.

THE TRUE REST.

*Fourth Sunday after Easter*, 1887.

"And I said, O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I get me away far off, and remain in the wilderness."—Ps. lv. 6, 7 ... ... 294

XXIV.

"UNTO THIS LAST."

*Septuagesima*, 1888.

"I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own?"—ST. MATT. 14, 15 306

Digitized by Google

XXV.

BALAAM.—I.

*Third Sunday after Easter*, 1888.

PAGE

"Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open."—NUM. xxiv. 3, 4 ... ... 31

XXVI.

BALAAM.—II.

*Fourth Sunday after Easter*, 1888.

"Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"—NUM. xxiii. 10 ... ... 334

XXVII.

PRAYER.—I.

THE TRUE CONCEPTION OF PRAYER.

*Second Sunday in Lent*, 1888.

"And it came to pass, that, as Jesus was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray."—ST. LUKE xi. 1 ... ... 348

XXVIII.

PRAYER.—II.

THE REASONABLENESS OF PRAYER.

*Third Sunday in Lent*, 1888.

"And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."—ST. LUKE xi. 1 ... ... ... ... ... ... 359

Digitized by Google

XXIX.

JACOB'S SIN.

*Fourth Sunday in Lent*, 1886.

PAGE

"All these things are against me."—GEN. xlii. 36 ... ... 375

XXX.

JACOB'S WRESTLING.

*Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity*, 1886.

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."—GEN. xxxii. 24–28 385

XXXI.

THE REAL MESSAGE OF SOCIALISM.

*Before the University of Oxford. Second Sunday in Advent*, 1887.

"And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation."—ST. MATT. xii. 25 ... ... ... ... ... 398

XXXII.

THE BOOK OF JOB.

*Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany*, 1887.

"Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?"—JOB i. 7 ... ... ... ... 416

Digitized by Google

XXXIII.

GOD'S JUDGMENT AND OURS.

*St. Paul's Cathedral, Advent Sunday; Holy Trinity, Third Sunday in Advent*, 1887.

PAGE

"The righteous judgment of God."—ROM. ii. 5 ... ... 429

XXXIV.

LIFE THROUGH DEATH.

*Harvest Festival*, 1886.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."—ST. JOHN xii. 24 ... ... ... 440

XXXV.

DAVID.

*Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity*, 1886.

"David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that He commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."—I KINGS xv. 5 ... ... ... ... 422

XXXVI.

LAST WORDS.

*Ninth Sunday after Trinity*, 1888.

"God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."—ST. JOHN iv. 24 ... ... ... 466

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# *THE MAINTENANCE OF THE TRUE LIFE.*

"Jesus answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."—ST. MATT. iv. 4.

CHRIST'S answers to Satan during the Temptation, which I am proposing to consider with you, have all alike one great moral purpose underlying them—they insist on the great and foremost necessity of absolute submission to the Will of God. The wilderness was God's appointment. The circumstances in the wilderness,—the failure of bread, the utter loneliness, the company of the beasts, were clearly God's appointment, and whatever the pain of submission, the moral duty was inevitable. To have set Himself free by any means from existing surroundings would have involved one of two things—either despair of God's Love, or downright rebellion. The latter alternative is inadmissible even as a supposition, and it is in the former obviously that the strength and incidence



Digitized by Google

of the first temptation lay. To despair of God—how possible! Had not His greatest saints poured forth sometimes, in psalm and prophetic utterance, language which seemed to have only one meaning—that they were hopeless; the passionate language of despair mingling even with the highest enthusiasm for God and the utmost longing after His Presence? Despair of God! Would not the wilderness itself, barren, stony, featureless, hard, arid, suggest it to a mind so full of sensibility to the influence of nature as His? Despair of God! Who that has ever felt, however slightly, the gnawing pains of hunger only for a few hours can help knowing how the physical weakness and the hard grinding agony of conscious and unintermittent want must have given power to such a temptation. And the whole thing so easily remedied—apparently only a word necessary, and a word that would prove so much, and cost so little! The Son of God indeed He might have been recognized to be if He had spoken that word, and the result had followed. And yet really, just to have spoken that word would have placed Him out of harmony with all God's methods of government as well as outside the circle of humanity; would have been a witness against that moral purpose which underlay all His own miracles; would have proved that He, the Father's Son, despaired of the Father's Love. And this was

Digitized by Google

the issue really decided by His not yielding to the darkness of despair; He trusted, in spite of and beyond all appearances, in the Father's Love, and so He conquered. And so it is that the words in which His unalterable submission to God's Will are conveyed contain within them a principle of the very widest application in all the perplexities and difficulties which the circumstances of life bring to God's children. He spoke them as our elder Brother; they are words for the whole race of God's puzzled and well-nigh despairing children. Every question which rises and perplexes us about our surroundings—why we ever were allowed to drift into them? why God appointed them? why for us the hard, barren featureless wilderness of an apparently futile life, whose uselessness we cannot remedy? why we cannot command stones to be made bread? why we have powers for which there is no outlet, talents and no room to use them in? why we have to endure trials so petty, yet so piercing and incisive as another's tongue and temper involve, while we are conscious of such possibilities of usefulness, such high aims, such noble motives for greater work? why this starvation in our environment, this bleak and barren and dreary wilderness for our surroundings? why this inward craving for what must be better for us?—these and the other thousand questions, that

Digitized by Google

haunt and perplex and baffle us, all get a light on them from His answer, "Man shall not"—cannot, does not—"live by bread alone;" there is a deeper, better life which the very absence of bread, the failure of material surroundings, brings only into more entire prominence. To limit one's mental horizon to the material is to ensure only deeper and darker despair, to raise only fresh and more unanswerable questions. This and this only is certain—there is a higher life, a life known and felt and realized by those who are convinced that God is their Father, and therefore trust Him; and this life, which is life indeed, is nourished, fed, and sustained, "not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

This is a great principle, a principle which we often only very slowly, very painfully grasp. We inherit, we are steeped by education too often in a conviction that is exactly destructive of this principle—a conviction that man does live by bread alone; that his material surroundings are all important; that, having secured them, he may possibly proceed at his leisure and according to his convenience to consider the importance of "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," but that, first and foremost, they must be secured. And no doubt we can say a great deal that is very plausible in defence of our position; such things as that "a man must live," that

Digitized by Google

"high sentiment will not provide us with our dinner," and so forth. Still, the position that man "lives by bread alone" is always dangerous, generally fatal to any higher living. It ties a man down like a caged bird; it deadens any attempt at aspiration. It is quite true that there is a sense, and a very real sense, in which bread is a necessity. Christ does not raise that question at all by the principle He lays down; the question He raises is whether bread *anyhow or by any means* obtained is a matter of first importance, and directly we see this we get into a region where the perspective is truer. Christ does not preach, like some fanatic, a crusade against bread, against material surroundings of any kind; He does not say that they matter nothing at all; He simply puts them in their right place, and says be not over-anxious about them: they are, they must be always and everywhere, subordinate. The first and foremost thing to be considered is a life which they cannot touch except indirectly, and to put them first is to fail ultimately even of any conception of that life; to aim at them as though they were everything, as though bread, *i.e.* material surroundings were the supreme object, is to ensure this one thing, viz. that they will hide all greater things from our eyes. Bread there must be in the widest sense, *i.e.* material surroundings, but bread alone as the sole object of man's desire, bread as the aim and object

Digitized by Google

of life, bread as the supreme thing, to which all else is to be sacrificed, is what is inconsistent ultimately with any attention to the higher life, the life that has to live by the study of and obedience to every commandment of God, by the desire for every revelation of Himself. Bread there must be, but the attempt to live on "bread alone," however made, means always failure, disappointment, misery. There comes a time to every man when he discovers this; the dread and the fear is that it should come too late—should come when, as far as one can see (I say emphatically as far as one can see), the time for repairing his mistake is over. There is always the hope that one may speak to some with whom it is not too late, some who are not too far gone, some who are slowly waking up to the absolute impossibility of living in any true sense by anything secondary and subordinate, riches or happy circumstances or pleasure or theories about goodness as distinct from the thing itself. With that hope I shall speak this morning.

I. Man, then, shall not, cannot live by bread alone; his nature is too great, too imperative in its demands, and the first shape in which the truth is brought home to him is generally in the inadequacy of *pleasure* of any kind, when pursued as an end, to satisfy him. The pursuit of pleasure as an end has been the moralist's theme from generation to generation, and

Digitized by Google

yet nothing seems to convince men of its inadequacy but their own bitter experience, and the bitterness is that in gaining that experience they so often seem to lose everything else; at the best, every bit of spring passes out of their lives. Ah! one can think now of those whose illusions have come to an end, of that dull, weary, hopeless look of the face when it speaks of the past that can never come back, that is only a torturing memory, and not a blessed possession. Man shall not live on pleasure alone, and—bitterest of ironies—by making it a supreme end he loses ultimately even the capacity for it, and only wakes up to find that in living for it he has ensured a harvest of emptiness and weariness. This much one must say in view of so many lives all round us apparently given up to the pursuit of pleasure; there are stories that can be read not in books, but in human faces—in the dull, dreary, vapid countenances, in the empty, hungry, restless expressions of the faces of men and women around us who live for pleasure—luxury or gambling or animal enjoyment—which are a warning that it needs no preacher's words to enforce, that tell their own story of the bitter result of losing the true end of life.

And surely it were well for all of us this Lent, to see how far the desire of pleasure has been ruling our lives, how far in that sense we are trying to "live

Digitized by Google

by bread alone." Is it so with us? Is it the growing question with us, not what ought I, but what should I like to do? You who are growing up in kind homes, gently and considerately treated, which is it that you think of, what is good and right and just, or what is pleasant and agreeable and convenient to do? Which is it that you think about? Is it what will help my father's or my husband's work, or what will save my mother or my wife some anxiety, or is it how shall I get through this day most pleasantly?

Try yourselves before it is too late, before your moral tone gravitates to a lower and ever a lower level, and you become capable of some hideous selfishness which you would shrink from now. There are men and women around us very monsters of selfishness, consuming everything beautiful and fresh and lovely, polluting and destroying it; who entrap the innocent and leave them desolate! We shrink from them. Alas for ourselves! if we go on asking what is pleasant? what is nice? we may, we shall, become as they. And the life that is real life, the life of love for God and for goodness and purity and nobleness, will fade away; the life, that gives up and surrenders and loses itself only to find itself more deeply, becomes more and more impossible every year and even every week that we try to live

Digitized by Google

for pleasure, live *i.e.* by bread alone, and think nothing of "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

II. There is a higher absorption that still is defective. "Man shall not live by bread alone," or by any material surroundings, not even by his work alone, not even in fulfilling the first law of his being. Great and sacred as are the claims of work of any kind that can be called work,—our calling, our profession or trade, man must not, shall not, live by it alone. There is here a subtle danger consequent on the danger of comparison of self with others. Those of us who honestly labour at our calling, and see others round us wholly given up to seeking amusement, find it hard sometimes not to think that, where the difference is so great as it is between work and idleness, it must involve everything. "I work hard" is a reason easily given and readily accepted often for want of spiritual and moral cultivation. Brethren, man was meant to work, and he only evades that law at his peril; but he was not meant to do nothing but a certain kind of work, to become so absorbed in it as to deaden himself into a producing machine.

Great as is the fascination of labour or of intellectual study to some, it needs to be said to them, "You must make time for other things." If your work is to be hallowed, consecrated, and

Digitized by Google

brought into a higher sphere, it must be done, not as though you lived for work alone, not as though in that sense you could live by "bread alone," but amid your work you must find room to consider "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." And Lent is a time when it is well to look carefully how far we are becoming absorbed in anything short of what is highest and best—at any rate, how far we are consecrating our work by the highest motives, the strictest regard for fairness and honesty, suspecting ourselves where we have liberty; not becoming slaves to any occupation, but making time for the highest spiritual communing, without which no man can hope to hear "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

III. And lastly, let us not make the mistake which so many make, naturally enough, when first startled out of their life of pleasure, the mistake mere formalists foster; let us not think that an increase of religious observances, hearing more sermons, and going more often to Church, will meet our Lord's life-principle. Man shall not live by going to Church more often alone, or by any religious observance in itself, but the danger is that he should think he can, and it is especially a danger in an age of revival like our own.

One can easily see, in the announcements of frequent services and sermons which fill the notice-

Digitized by Google

boards of our Churches, signs of religious activity for which we are thankful, but also one may see a grave and growing danger—a danger of "hearing and not doing," a danger of treating these things as an end, and not as a means. You can see the ground all round you strewn with the carcases of those who have made this mistake; they bear on them the stamp of uselessness. Who more useless than the woman or the man who is always going to Church, and never tired of petty gossip, or of discussing some ecclesiastical frippery or millinery in the intervals? What type of character is so low as that which seems to combine, apparently, great devoutness and obviously extreme worldliness or untruthfulness? No doubt many of us do not need precisely this warning; some are contented already with a minimum of church-going, and have no desire to go beyond it. No doubt some might enlarge their devotional practice in Lent from right motives, with a view to a more determined effort to live a higher life. Certainly I should be the last to wish to discourage them, only I would say, do not make a mistake, and think that that alone will make you better.

Go twice, go seven times a day to Church, only be sure something comes out of it that flows into your life, that it makes you better, more kind, more self-denying in your own homes. Go by all means;

Digitized by Google

only be sure it helps you to seek the "kingdom of God and His righteousness," and does not only result in increasing irritability of temper, or in a pharisaic sense of your own superiority. To go to Church, it is nothing—it may be but a way of spending an idle hour; but to worship, to pray, to listen so as to learn better how to aspire, it is much. To come out of Church, to compare preacher with preacher, or service with service, it is nothing and worse than nothing; but to come out like Moses, with the light on the countenance that tells of communing with the Divine, it is everything. Man shall not, does not, cannot live by any observance only, but "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Let us see that we use our opportunities in Lent wisely according to our needs; for they are opportunities and we are responsible for their use; but above all, let us "cease to do evil and learn to do well." To think more, to pray more, to read the Bible more, to try to get one's life into a growing likeness with the Life of Christ, is the true work of Lent; to live for others, to think of those around us, and to put ourselves out to please them, is real self-discipline. It is not the going to Church at convenient times, but it is the troubling one's self to go to an early service when the mind is fresh and undistracted; it is the moral earnestness involved in

Digitized by Google

an early Communion that catches "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." It is not the hearing of sermons in a shallow, thoughtless way; it is the thinking about them, and finding whatever is deep and true in them; it is the treasuring of inspirations that come through them, that is the disposition that catches "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." God help us all to it this Lent; God help us to cast off each and every effort to live in any shape by bread alone—be it the bread of pleasure or work or of mere religious dissipation—and to aim and pursue after the righteousness that only comes from absolute submission to His Will in all things as far as we know It, from a resolute attempt to live up to all known truth and all known duty, *i.e.* to live by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Digitized by Google

## *THE GREAT DANGER OF THE TRUE LIFE.*

"Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."—ST. MATT. iv. 7.

IN Christ's first conflict He laid down in the midst of a wilderness a great life-principle; He refused to despair of God or to put Himself outside the fellowship of those whose nature He had taken; He taught us as our elder Brother how to meet the great temptation to despair of God, how to maintain our true life. The next trial appeals to a different set of feelings. The place is different, the circumstances are changed. He is on a pinnacle of the Temple, looking down into the holy city itself—no longer away from men, but among men; He looks down and sees His own people among whom He was born. He sees some hurrying hither and thither intent on gain, on anything rather than God's promises; sees their religious leaders "blind leaders of the blind," some seeking to preserve a human tradition as the support of their own self-righteousness, others plotting how

Digitized by Google

to please Herod, others scoffing at God's Wisdom, proud only of their own ; and the people, the multitudes whom He loved, the simple, homely, quiet people, the poor folk, wandering about as "sheep not having a shepherd," the prey of political selfishness or religious partisanship. All this was before His eyes, and, remember, the one great wish of His heart was to deliver these prisoners out of captivity, to gather together these outcasts, to preach deliverance to these captives, and to make them a holy people acceptable to the Lord. No reformer ever burned so eagerly to cure abuses, no philanthropist ever longed so earnestly to raise the condition of the people, none ever cared so much that His own should live their highest life ! And for them there was, He knew, but one hope, viz. to acknowledge Him, and then to be delivered from false teachers and corrupt systems, not by seeing through them, but by taking Him as their light and their salvation. How could it be affected ? How could they be convinced at once and for ever that He was all He claimed to be ? In the answer to this question lies the whole power of the suggestion, "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down," *i.e.* rely on the Father's power, "for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee." * It is as though the tempter had said, "Thou

* F. D. Maurice, Sermon on "Christ in the Wilderness."

Digitized by Google

art right. It is not for the Son of God to seek relief or comfort by commanding stones to be made bread, but to produce an effect on the people of this city, these sheep without a shepherd, these poor ignorant deluded men; to shake, by an act of supreme power, the self-righteous and the self-wise out of their false dreams; to show what wrongs these religious teachers are doing in God's Name; to make them see, by a transcendent miracle, that One has come Who has a claim to speak as sent by God, to prove the Father's Love and the Father's care. This surely is different; there is no despair, no want of trust here. This is not to give up Thy faith; it is to show the greatest faith for the highest ends, to commit Thyself to God, to rely on His promise. This is not, as in the wilderness, to separate Thyself from men by using miraculous power; it is to claim the promise made to men long ago, that God's angels should be ever bearing them up and preserving them from danger."

Such was the force of the temptation, strange, deep, and awful, appealing to Christ's love of His own people, to His trust in the Father; going far deeper than any mere proposal to relieve physical wants could ever go.

Wherein, then, lay the evil? What caused Christ to so unhesitatingly reject the suggestion? Because the evil of the other temptation lay, where all evil lies,

Digitized by Google

if we only think it out—in self-will, in antagonism to the Will of God, that self-will which is the bane alike of Church movements and individual life; not waiting on God's way of working things out and throwing ourselves into that, but making out a way of our own. To cast Himself down would have been to choose a self-willed way of influencing and instructing men, and in that way it would have been self-exaltation. He Who "could do nothing but what He saw the Father do," Whose wishes must have the Divine impress on them, "Whose meat it was to do His Will and finish His work," must not, cannot separate Himself from the ways of the Father. There was the appointed way, "the baptism to be baptized with," and with that the sustaining power would come. Once give it up, once surrender this faith, and there is nothing left but a series of acts of self-will, and self-will continued must and will destroy all faith; it is its deadly antagonist, its unrelenting foe. It says to faith continually, "Your sight is dim, and your methods are slow; stand aside. I can see further, know more, and get a better result." But when it gains the victory, faith dies—no doubt a lingering death, but a certain one—in every man, woman or child who gives way to self-will. Often, no doubt, the decisive collision is delayed, but there is a warfare between the two that admits of no permanent truce.



Digitized by Google

Thousands of reasons might have suggested themselves to our Lord for compliance, thousands of good reasons; but the issue was as clear and unmistakable as before. Did He trust God? did He believe in the Father's Wisdom? Would He choose God's circumstances, or should He carve out His own? And it is this alternative of which His answer disposes. Whatever the difficulties of the Father's appointed way, whatever the allurement of short and easy methods, whatever full assurances of protection may be quoted even from the Bible, still there is this always and everywhere to be maintained, and kept as a principle of life, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." It is a harder saying for many than "Man shall not live by bread alone," for it finds out those who do try to live the higher life, who are conscious of high aims and noble motives; whose craving is not to live the lower life, to live by "bread alone," but to find pinnacles on which they may display the higher. It speaks to the element of self-assertion in human work, that element which we find sometimes so mixed up with what is otherwise strong, healthy, courageous, forcible, and useful, that we are misled into thinking that it must be a necessary element in it; we are led into thinking that the power which it often gets is a true kind of influence, and because it works, as it does, drastically, because it sweeps down oppositions

Digitized by Google

and stifles every symptom of independence, and makes solitudes which it misnames peace, and appears to get its own way, that therefore it is the real ideal.

Think, though, before we pass to consider its real defect, viz. the fact that it tempts God—think really how the greatest life of all, the strongest influence, would have been marred by it; think what would Christ have been if He had manifested Himself as self-assertion instead of as love, if He had appeared on a pinnacle and cast Himself down to win the applause of men, if He had claimed surrender to an arbitrary rule instead of to an inward conviction, if He had claimed to crush man's reason by despotic vetos on its exercise, if He had based His reign on strong prohibition, and not on attraction. Why has He the power that He has even now over thousands of troubled souls? Why is He now the Rest, the Refuge of myriads who were otherwise in hopeless doubt? Why is He the Hope of those who have tried all other ideals and found them but wind? Surely because He was "despised and rejected;" surely because His life was a pattern of truth and love and forbearance amid the deepest shame and sorrow, because He would not crush or break, but win.* A mere display of power would never have constructed "a kingdom that cannot be moved;" it

* Brookfield's Sermon on the Temptation.

Digitized by Google

might have gained the servile adoration of slaves, but it would never have won the obedience of children; it might have dazzled, but it could not have refreshed and renewed. Christ casting Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple would never have drawn the broken-down and wounded, nor even the hopeful and enthusiastic to Himself, as did the spectacle of One who while "He saved others, could not save Himself." Look how conscious He is of the weakness of mere power! Look how He reserves all His wondrous power for special occasions—for the paralytic, whom none could help; for the bereaved sisters of Lazarus! What a backwardness in working wonders, still more in letting them be spoken of! "See thou tell no man;" and again, "Blessed are they that have not seen, but yet"—because of the truth of His life—"have believed." He drew mankind "with the cords of a man, with the bands of love," as no demonstrations of power would ever have drawn men.

I pass on to consider the life-principle involved in our Lord's answer, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." To tempt God, what is it? Let us first of all discard all mere humanized conceptions of God. Let us never sully our thought about Him by imputing to Him that jealousy of success or greatness in His children which we count so base among our fellow-men. One of the most depressing lines of

Digitized by Google

thought that runs through those wondrous minor chords of the grand music of human literature—the great Greek tragedies—is the perpetual fear lest prosperity should produce that insolence which would provoke the jealousy and the vengeance of the immortal gods. Let us rid ourselves of any suspicions of such lurid feelings; let us believe in God, the Father, Who loves His children, and rejoices in their real success, and yet let us shrink from a self-assertion which seeks to be independent of His Love and care.

I. What, then, is it to tempt God? Surely it is to put our trust in that which places us outside His Love and protection, in circumstances, in surroundings, *i.e.* in self in some subtle shape. There is a temptation—and it is a very subtle one, one very likely to escape one's own notice—to think that one's surroundings free one from dangers that other men are exposed to; that one is on a pinnacle in that sense, the pinnacle of a good name or a social position, or even of a frequent use of the means of grace. Inwardly and really we may thus tempt God, in no common sense as though God were offended at our goodness, but we may induce Him to show us for our own ultimate good how our true safety is in nothing but in Him alone; how nothing, no good name, no assured position, no frequent use of the means of Grace, can ever make it safe for us to set ourselves on pinnacles.

Digitized by Google

The voices that speak to us from the New Testament use no doubtful language about such dangers; "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;" "The last shall be first, and the first last;" "Be not high-minded, but fear." And many are the hours of painful regret and poignant misery that have been passed by God's own true servants, who have forgotten their true strength and real safety, and turned to the "strength of Egypt"—their good name, their assured position, the pinnacle of their excellent principles. "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Thou, Lord, hast made my hill so strong; Thou didst turn Thy face from me, and I was troubled." Over the sad hours of bitter self-reproach there is written this warning, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

II. Surely too, much more often is it the case that we tempt God when we put ourselves in circumstances of our own choosing, which we know to be dangerous. We may, of course, pass through them unscathed, but even if we do we have to all intents and purposes disregarded the principle, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Alas! how slow men and women are to learn this most obvious lesson! Let us follow it out a little. Each of us has a history, a secret history known only to ourselves, it may be, and to God. There are places, there are

Digitized by Google

persons, and there are occasions which are a danger to us; they may be nothing to others, and therefore their conduct can be no guide to us; but our own life-book, if we will read it, has this marked plainly—here or there, or with him or her, there is danger, difficulty, disturbance of mind. There I lost, perhaps, the true peace of God in my heart, the consciousness of the Father's smile; in that place I became dead to unseen things. Then it is that the warning comes, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." It is childish to think that you can go anywhere because now you are so determined. There are situations, voluntary situations, too perilous for any of us; and the question that decides everything is not what we shall do in them, because that is absolutely certain, but whether we will go into them or not. Of course, anywhere that we can honestly say that duty and God's Providence lead us, there we may safely go, and expect to be under the charge of angels, only it were well to determine (where inclination gives us any bias) that we will decide such questions not by what we can make ourselves believe about duty, but by what we should say to our children or brothers or sisters in a similar case. Surely no carefulness is excessive in such cases. For it is not the temptations that meet men; it is the temptations they court and dally with which cause the most moral and spiritual

Digitized by Google

mischief. Many men want no devil to tempt them. Satan stands aside, and they are their own devil. For them the Master has but one word, "If thy right eye offend thee"—if the nearest and dearest to thee cause thee to stumble—"pluck it out, cast it from thee." Better to live here a maimed life than to ruin yourself for ever.

III. Once more there are temptations which beset some of us more directly, and allure us to try to stand on a pinnacle and cast ourselves down. To desire influence and supremacy over the minds of men, as an end in itself, in order to carry out our own will because it is our own will, to impress upon our surroundings our own individuality—these often are the temptations of greater minds, of those with real force of character. To such one must say that to turn into occasions of personal display or to use for selfish purposes the power which God has given us is to tempt, to counteract God. Thousands of such mistakes have been made by men who thought they were honouring God and helping their brethren, and who saw that it was less trouble to push people as it were by force in front of them than to walk with them in sympathy or go before them by example. Many who have powers to be Christ's most effective servants, and who have been so to a great extent (I will not suggest names;

Digitized by Google

some great names of mediæval Churchmen as an example will occur to the minds of any one), would have been far greater, far more helpful to the world if only they had refrained in this fashion from mounting pinnacles; if only they had trusted to the Love of God, and to the sympathy of Christ, rather than to their own love of power and self-assertion. Force, at any rate in this sense, is no remedy; it always promotes reactions, reactions which sweep away even its good results. The only way really and lastingly to help others is not by mounting on pinnacles, but for the "strong to bear the infirmities of the weak;" not to drive or enslave them, but to *bear* the infirmities, and so to help them to get rid of them. So we work together with God, and to work with God is not only the highest honour man can have; it alone enables us to work with any good result to ourselves or to others. No doubt this is a hard saying in an age when the tendency is to worship results quickly obtained, however attained; when even in the Church men try to measure spiritual results like inspectors do in schools, by a brief and hurried examination, *e.g.* by counting up the number of communicants. Yet always for those who sow not for time only, but for an endless future, no result can ever be worth having that is obtained at the sacrifice or disregard of a life-principle. The end of

Digitized by Google

a precocious, of a brilliant career during boyhood, is so often in our experience a failure in manhood; and so a strong, masterful driving influence may seem to get wonderful results, to stand on a pinnacle in the Church of God and cast itself down; and yet when the day of realities dawns it may be found to have accomplished nothing in comparison with the strength that refused to tempt God by climbing on pinnacles, but which walked with Him in deepest reverence and with His brethren in deepest sympathy along the plain level of its God-appointed duty. These are some of the dangers against which our Lord's life-principle warns us. We can, and may, tempt God by self-assertion; by thinking that we can stand alone, and so running into danger; by using what influence we have for personal display.

One other thought in conclusion. Let not any of us tempt God in another sense by the uselessness of our lives—by vain, frivolous, persistent idleness. Do not we tempt Him year after year, as He comes and finds us doing nothing, using gifts and powers for our own gratification, living for ourselves? Do not we tempt Him to say, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" Still more; if our lives are positively hurtful—hurtful by our evil influence, our pride, or passion, or lust—surely they cry aloud to heaven, they tempt even the All-Merciful to bring

Digitized by Google

them to an end. A man may be saved from worse evil, and begin a new life, simply by the one reflection that the world would be a better place if he were cut off from it—that his life tempts God. He may be stirred by that one reflection to make a really fresh start. And let me say this—the resolve to do no harm is useless, unless we resolve to try to be of some use. There are moments of insight when the laziest see possibilities of usefulness; when those cumbering the ground get inspirations; when the logs, even the blood-suckers of humanity, dream dreams and see visions. Alas! too often they pass and are forgotten. Ah! if there comes to any one here this morning a sense of the uselessness of his life, a bitter sense it may be, that the world would be as good, if not a better place without him, to such a one I speak. There is time, hope, everything; the past is a desert, yet the future is yours still, only resolve this day to try to do something to relieve your life from the curse of barrenness. Kneel and ask God, and He will show you the path of life, the path of usefulness, the path along which you may be kept and guarded by His angels till you pass to new spheres of duty and usefulness in the unhindered service of the world beyond.

Digitized by Google

## *THE SAFEGUARD OF THE TRUE LIFE.*

"Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."—ST. MATT. iv. 10.

THIS was Christ's answer to the larger, the bolder, the last, invitation of the evil spirit. He had been tempted to place Himself outside the laws which govern our nature, and again to set up His own will to choose for Himself a way of redeeming His own people; and He met these temptations by the assertion of two life-principles which have already occupied us. But now a larger issue presented itself. He had come to redeem not only His own people—the shepherdless sheep, whom He had seen below Him as He stood on the pinnacle. He had come to set up a kingdom over all nations. "The Gentiles were to come to His light, the isles were to wait for His law." "His dominion was to be from one sea to the other, from the flood unto the world's end." "The kings of Tharsis and of the isles, of

Digitized by Google

Arabia and Saba were to bring gifts; all kings should fall down before Him, and all nations should do Him service." This was the promise, and yet here He was in the wilderness, apparently the loneliest, the poorest of men; weakened through fasting, torn with an inward conflict of the most awful and oppressive nature, with all His powers strained to the uttermost; and in a moment the scene is changed! Before Him lie the kingdoms of the world and their glory, stretched out as on a plain—a grand, a glorious, a splendid, a unique vision, and the voice, "All these will I give Thee if Thou will fall down and worship me," *i.e.* pay me one act of homage. Think of the vividness, the life of the scene before Him compared with the dull dreariness, the physical hardness of the wilderness; conceive the effect on the imagination; think of the contrast on a smaller scale; think even of taking a man from a lonely dungeon, and showing him some fair English scene as seen from the top of the hills of Westmoreland, or the moors of Yorkshire, and telling him that he should exchange the dreariness of the one for the possession of the other, if only he would perform some trifling act of homage! And the fairest scene on which man has gazed was nothing to what Christ saw. There was the picture before His eye, clear and bright and distinct, not only of this fair world, its woods and mountains, its

Digitized by Google

winding rivers and lovely pastoral scenes, and all the wealth of natural beauty which it contains, but of what was infinitely more interesting to Him than any surroundings *—human life as it was actually being lived. And, alas! wherever He turned He saw sorrow and confusion, sin and darkness—men and brothers rending and tearing one another; God's laws broken, family life disturbed by quarrels, national life marred by the pride of kings and the folly of subjects. He saw the kingdoms of this world with their ideals perverted, their glory conceived of not as though it were to establish wise and orderly government, but as if it were to tear each other, to bite and devour, for the strong to enslave the weak. He saw the weak crying out in the dull hopeless anguish of oppression, crying out to Heaven and to Him that He would come and reign, that He would establish His kingdom. Think how the cries of all the weak and suffering souls must have struck His ears; how deeply the despair of the simple bewildered souls, who saw injustice reign in great Rome or polished Athens and felt that somewhere and somehow there must be some one who ought to reign, who could establish a kingdom in righteousness, must have moved Him! Oh that He would come and reign—such was their inarticulate cry.

* F. D. Maurice, Sermon on "Christ in the Wilderness."

Digitized by Google

Oh that He would cast out this evil! Oh that He would take this great power of bringing tyranny to an end, of undoing oppressions, of setting up justice and truth on earth! And as He gazed and longed in His inmost heart to rescue these poor sufferers, to make all things new, the promoter of all these crimes and oppressions, and injustices and wrongs, spoke to His very inmost soul. "All these will I give Thee"—give them up, take my presence out of them, "if Thou wilt fall down and worship me," *i.e.* pay me some act of homage, own my power. Was it not but too true that evil had prevailed on the earth? Had not the devil earned a show of right to point to all the sin and misery, and to say, "These are mine; I can give to them whomsoever I will?" and if Christ were to consent, could He not answer the prayers of these humble folk; could not He at once make these kingdoms peaceful and glorious with a true glory; could He not deliver them from the bondage of the evil one's presence? And what price was He asked to pay? Merely to do some act of homage to that power of evil which seemed to be in real possession; to own in theory what was true apparently in fact; to effect what we should call a wise and liberal compromise; to give a very little and to gain an enormous advantage for millions of mankind—no

Digitized by Google

less than the departure of the spirit of evil and his power from among them.

No doubt there was humiliation involved, but had He not humbled Himself already? Would not the tempter whisper, "Would it not be glorious to show that there was no depth He would not stoop to, no sacrifice of dignity He would not endure to really help mankind?" Ah! when we look at it first, we think it almost wonderful that Satan could have been so stupid as to set this thought before Christ, "Fall down and worship me;" but when we look more fully into it we see that the temptation was deep and subtle, appealing to all that was most holy and most loving in Him, in a secret and wonderful way. We see the force of the trial when we see the extent of the offer.

No doubt it must be said, though, that there was a root-lie in the temptation, and that the whole force and meaning of the temptation lay in the lie, viz. that the kingdoms of the world were the devil's, and that he could, by withdrawing from them, leave them for Christ. This was what our Lord could not, would not, listen to and acknowledge. To confess the devil to be the real lord of the world would have been to deny His Father's rights and His own. But if it was a lie it was a plausible one; it had much to point to as its justification—the horrible vision of human

Digitized by Google

misery and human crime; the actual fact that He saw men serving evil spirits in thought, word, and deed, that He saw kings and people choosing the devil's glory, and making it their glory. And yet in spite of all this seeming, He knew that these kingdoms were not the devil's, but His Father's and His own. He knew that men's sin and subsequent misery consisted in this, that they thought the devil was their king, when God was in reality. And His answer touches this very point. It is as though He had said, in spite of all this seeming, "God has claimed the world from the first. Here it is written, written once, and it is true now, written in His Book, and I am come to repeat His claim. I am come, too, to rescue the world from usurpers; to teach men to look up to Him Who is, and reigns and loves: 'Thou shalt worship Him as thy God.' I am come to teach them, too, that His rule is not shared by any other; that the Righteous King has not half a claim and thou the other half. 'Him only shalt thou serve'—this is the command, the promise, the testimony, and I am come to fulfil it."

So trust and obedience prevailed again. Let us see what He thereby won for us.

I. He won a great deliverance from the deepest despair, deliverance from the great lie, πρωτὸν ψεῦδος, the dark idea that evil rules the world. No doubt



Digitized by Google

our eyes could not bear to look on what Christ saw; if we were to see only a little, even London as it really is, we should see enough to make us think that the devil's boast was true when he said, "This is mine." Hundreds of men have thought, and said so, and said so in the belief that they were serving God by saying it. In point of fact, they were admitting a blasphemous thought into their minds; they were doing that very homage to the evil spirit which he tried, and tried in vain, to persuade Christ to do. For what is really and deeply true of us and of all baptized men and women is, that we belong to God; if we or they forget it or disown it, that is no doubt our and their misery, but it does not undo the fact. If we turn our backs on the commandment, on the privilege, "Thou shalt have none other gods but Me," and make the evil spirit our god, that is our lie; but even if every man is a liar, the thing is true that we are God's children and He is our Father. We may dwell in a false relation to Satan, do homage to him, submit to him in thought and own him lord, but nothing can make the real first relation untrue. We may refuse our position or slight it, but it is ours. Just so in earthly families: a son or daughter may disgrace themselves, but they remain sons and daughters; nothing can undo that. And besides this, God has this power, which He shares

Digitized by Google

with none—the power of creation and vivification. The evil spirit can create nothing, not even an insect or a flower; it can spoil and destroy, but it cannot create.* Even death, which, in a sense, once belonged to him, Christ has taken from him.† However bad things may seem, however stained and tarnished and depressed your own life may be, however dead you feel, spiritually dead, still you are God's, and you can say to yourself, "The God of truth, of righteousness, and of love, the God and Father of Christ, is my God, my Father. I have forgotten and ignored the fact, but nothing can destroy it. I cannot feel it, but it is true; there is none other to whom I owe homage, no other power to whom I am subject save by my own choice. I have forsaken and forgotten Him, but still He is my God and my Father, and I am His child—and Him, and Him only, must I worship and serve." Let the one who is most sunk in sin grasp this and lean on it till life grows within him; let him lay hold on this, which is at once the sure foundation of a great hope, and the one answer to the perpetual temptation that besets him to yield to Satan's lie and to believe that he does rule, that evil is stronger and must win.

* F. D. Maurice, Sermon on "Christ in the Wilderness."
† Heb. ii. 14.

Digitized by Google

II. Ah! how hard it is to believe it sometimes; how faint our sense grows of this imperishable fact; how we let go our truth and honesty and are betrayed into a thousand unworthinesses, because we forget it, because we let ourselves drift into thinking that falsehood and evil are the kings of this world, and that if we are to overcome it we must make a compromise, a bargain with them! This is the second great victory Christ won for us by His answer. We who worship the Father cannot do evil that good may come. What an awful temptation it has been even to men who have wished to be good, as history proves, to practise frauds and utter lies for God's supposed honour; to do base and cruel things, *e.g.* to persecute for the sake of establishing faith, or to use religion so as to make people superstitious; to let them have a popular religion which deals in holy wells and springs and votive offerings which the cultured are not expected to believe in! And men, good men, have worked in such systems, and have not seen that for any one to allow that a lie can ever serve God is to give Satan all he asks, is to admit a compromise with moral evil. Or we—alas! we—ministers of God, do we never know the temptation, and, alas! the guilt of deceiving God's people; of saying something we do not really believe for the sake of leading you to do something we wish you to do;

Digitized by Google

of supporting some movement based, as we believe, on false principles because it is popular or on the chance that it may do good; of keeping back some hard saying on the sins of our day, because we don't want to offend influential people? If we do any of these things we are insulting God, and showing that we do not really believe in Him as our Master, or that we think we can take a turn sometimes in the devil's service. Over and over again, men who would not lie in words have lied in heart, been false to their convictions, supported institutions whose ways were questionable, fallen down and worshipped popular idols for the sake of influence. When shall we learn that God needs no man's lies to bolster up His cause, and that only just so far as we truly reflect the light that He has placed in us shall we be of any use, or avoid being a terrible mischief, a means of darkness and confusion.

The question in one way or another is always coming up, Are men called upon to divest themselves of opportunities of influence over public opinion, or over sections of society, by refusing to compromise truth, as they know it, to the extent that it is necessary to preserve this influence? A writer, who certainly cannot be said to approach the question from a Christian point of view, has given us the true, real, Christian answer from the platform

Digitized by Google

of natural truth and honesty: "What influence can a man exert that should seem to him more useful than that of a protester against what he counts false opinions in the most decisive of all regions of thought? What better service can a man render than to furnish the world with an example of faithful dealing with his own conscience and with his fellows? This, at least, is the one talent that has been placed in the hands of the obscurest of us all." *

Surely, my brethren, it needs to remember this. It is so easy to swim with a great movement, to stifle your conscience, to soothe your sense of truth with the spiritual chloroform of some dogmatist, who talks about what God is doing and will do, as though God were a man in the next street. It is so hard to bring your beliefs to any real test, to think what you really believe, and to say that; so hard to confess that we are not so clear as others say that they are; so hard to be simply truthful and honest, and to remember that any mental dishonesty in God's service, the stifling even of an honest doubt, is a confession of the devil's kingship; so hard to take as our simple life-principle, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

III. But many of us are free from suggestions of this sort. We have not either inherited or made

* John Morley's "Essay on Compromise."

Digitized by Google

for ourselves that melancholic temperament which is always on the brink of despair, nor have we any disposition to the more vulgar and common form of compromise. Do we, therefore, escape this temptation? Does Satan find no way of tempting us to fall down and worship him, to do him homage, to own his dominion? Not in coarse and vicious ways, but in cultivated and refined ones, the trial surely comes.

It comes to some men and women through their strong and unquenchable restlessness; they will not, they cannot, bring themselves to acquiesce in the facts of life, to use the talent given them. If there is one thing above another that the facts of life ever increasingly bear witness to and force upon us in all sorts of ways, it is the limitations under which we live—limitations which run through every part of our being, limitations in our affections, in our will-power, in our brain-power, and in our nerve-force. Differing endlessly as we do in our amount of force in any direction, this sentence is written in grim letters at some end of each passage in our domain: "Thus far shalt thou go, and no further." And among the wisest and certainly the greatest efforts we ever make, after the dreams of youth have vanished, are the efforts, without yielding to sloth and to self-indulgence, to find our limitations, and to do our

Digitized by Google

life-work within them. Then we begin to be healthy life-powers, not mere imitators, still less mere blood-suckers, then we grow on our own roots, in our own legitimate sphere. Numbers of lives round us are made useless, are becoming mischievous, because they cannot take this in. The devil's mirage is always before them; they are absorbed in theories of life which every one else sees are wholly outside their possibility of achievement, but their cry goes on, "Give us time and scope, and we will realize our dreams, and get everything we want, and do everything which we see can be done." And it is hard for any one to give up their lingering gaze on the possible-under-other-conditions (to coin a phrase), to subject one's self to these stern limitations; it seems so much more attractive to set the world to rights on a large scale than to work humbly and honestly as our powers allow us to do. It is hard to be ambitious, which every man must be who is to do his best, and yet to resign ourselves to recognizing our limitations, and to touching the fringe only of things we might do; and yet, if we have learnt anything at all from living, we ought to have learnt this—that thoroughness in any department of life is the only thing that has any right to be called serving God, or has any abiding result. And thoroughness is only to be achieved by the recognition of our limitations.

Digitized by Google

There is such a contrast always and everywhere between the patient observer, the painstaking student, and the empiric with his remedies and his theories; such a contrast in their methods and in the results of their lives. The one, dazzled by Satan's visions, lives a life generally useless, always unreal; he is always grasping at shadows and forsaking substance; he thinks himself more clever than he is, and whether he thinks himself a poet and tortures our ears with his rhymes, or a musician and projects his compositions on our unwilling attention, his presence is equally unwelcome. The other may be humble and obscure, but he is a force in his way; he does his work and he recognizes his limitations. We feel the contrast between the two. What does it teach us? Surely to believe in our work and in God's appointment of it: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Surely to check ourselves sternly in any querulousness of mental disposition that leads us either to envy the circumstances of others, or to demand more favourable ones for ourselves; to recognize our own limitations, and to work, without sloth or morbid shrinking from public duty, honestly within them. Otherwise we know not how soon, in a moment of weakness, some specious mirage may be set before us and fascinate us and lead us away; otherwise we may discover,

Digitized by Google

too late, that we have granted the tempter his request and done homage to him and left the service of God only for the sake of some alluring vision of possibilities which fades even while we endeavour to grasp it. Whatever God is leading us to, whatever fields of usefulness may be opening before us, the worst preparation we can make for them is to yield to a mere restlessness, a desire for change for its own sake, a persistent ignoring of our own limitations.

IV. Again the temptation comes to others to own Satan's power and to do him homage in their anxiety to pierce the veil that surrounds the other world. And, alas! it is a temptation that he presents in so subtle and apparently innocent a form that it is not till we ask ourselves two or three plain questions that we see how unmistakably it is a temptation. I refer, of course, to the efforts made to foretell the future by palmistry, or to hold communion with the dead by means of spiritualism. Whatever reality there may be in such things amid the fraud and chicanery to which they so easily lend themselves, does any one really think, who ever thinks at all, that God in His infinite Holiness would choose that way of making a revelation to man? If he does, then that man must be told that he does not believe in God at all as Christ reveals Him, that his conception of God is utterly degraded. And if the

Digitized by Google

revelation be not from God, and yet be from the spiritual world, what other being but Satan has power over the spirits who surrender themselves to him?

Again, has not God unmistakably and clearly, all through the Bible, and all through the testimony of His saints and servants, said to us about that unseen world, and those who have entered into it, "It is better for you only to know in part"? and what can it be but either utter childishness or the most terrible of rebellions to try to tear from His keeping the secrets of the future, or of that hidden kingdom? This must be said, no reverent Christian could for one moment dare attempt so to trifle with God. It would expose his reverence to too severe a strain to imagine that, by descending to such a childish method as putting his hands on a table, he could gain God's permission to hold commune with those who are learning lessons which they did not learn here, and seeing things that their eyes were too dim to see here—things too awful to be uttered, too real to be made the subject of childish curiosity. There have been within the knowledge of some of us terrible results of half madness and whole misery, of strained and disorganized nervous systems, and of a complete loss of any apparent capacity for faith, which have followed from the

Digitized by Google

"intruding into things not seen," and the undoubted worship of Satan, which clairvoyance and spiritualism involve.

Is it any use to say a word of warning about such things which, one is told, are painfully on the increase? Not perhaps to some. There are some who have betrayed themselves to Satan, and have become helpless victims of a curiosity that can never be fully satisfied. But there may be those who are hovering on the brink, those whom some older friend —a very apostle of Satan—is tempting to try and dabble in the secrets of the unseen world; some one whose imagination has just been stirred by some undoubted coincidence, to whom one may yet say one word in time. To such I speak. And I do not say as some might say, that it is all lying and deceit; there may be something in it. What I ask is, is it from God? Would God choose that way to reveal the secrets of the unseen world? What would Christ have said to any one, to Mary or Martha, if they had proposed thus to remedy their bitter woe? Suppose there is some undiscovered law of mesmeric force which death does not dissolve. Surely that nerve-territory in which it works, and which has been and is Satan's very palace on earth (as you see from the history of demoniacal possession), is the very place in which we need the most entire self-control unless we

Digitized by Google

would submit to the most awful of penalties; or if those considerations do not move us, can we really think that God will go with us to such scenes and bless us amid them? And if we let go of His hand and go alone, and look at visions of devil-given knowledge, what are we doing? Are we not, at any rate, preparing to own Satan, asking to pay him homage? Is it not true that, as we look longingly at the secrets of the unseen world, the same voice comes again that came to Christ—"All this knowledge will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me"?

V. And once more, this safeguard is necessary to others for wholly different reasons. We are conscious of our own limitations and work restfully within them; we have no disposition to indulge in unhallowed curiosity; but we think vaguely, yet very perilously, that our increased education, our cultivation has made us free from the danger of such coarse and revolting proceedings as are involved in the worship of Satan. We compare ourselves with others, with those who frequent the beer-shop and the gin-palace, whose amusements are coarse and degrading, whose language is unrestrained and filthy, whose whole life is sensual, gross, and cruel. Such lives we may believe to be Satan-worshipping, but surely we are above that. Is it so? Is evil less evil because it has parted with its grossness? are the

Digitized by Google

amusements which fill our lighter hours, the works of fiction or the entertainments which find thousands of patrons, not for their artistic attractiveness, but because of their badness—are they less a homage to Satan than is afforded by frequenting the gin-palace and studying the *Police News?* Or short even of this, is there, has there been with some of us who love knowledge, unfaithfulness to conscience, willingness to starve our moral nature in the pursuit of knowledge? We see clearly enough the baseness of sacrificing conscience for riches, but it is only less base to sacrifice conscience and goodness in intellectual pursuits by taking liberties with duty, by neglecting self-discipline, by giving up honest work for greater show. And let us not think that cultivation saves us from this temptation. Cultivation does many things; but this it does always—it creates new responsibilities, while it lessens the hold of certain temptations? Only when there is the conviction that the worship of God is not mere lip-service, that devotion to His glory is the privilege of life, its "reasonable service," the fulfilment of its highest duty,—only in this does cultivation find its safety. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Otherwise there is nothing but danger and peril in the very things that should have been for our wealth. To all of us, depend

Digitized by Google

on it, educated or not, cultivated or ignorant, the temptation comes sooner or later from the evil spirit, "Fall down and worship me," and everything shall be yours; forget God—only that, for that is everything; then, as you must worship, you will set up another object—and you shall have the kingdoms of the world as your reward.

Christ's answer is the only safe one, and it is all-embracing. The kingdoms of the earth are a good, no doubt; but for a soul which was made by God and which will return to Him, there is but one solid lasting satisfaction, *i.e.* the kingdom of Heaven. What avails the gaining of the world if the soul is not saved from that self-will which is death eternal—if it is torn violently or charmed away from its true end, "the kingdom that cannot be moved"? *

"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." It was a great, a wondrous, a goodly spectacle on which our Master gazed as He uttered this life-principle. But He answered to what we feel to be the true ideal of man in uttering it. It is the one rule of life that admits of neither compromise nor modification, the one safeguard for all, whatever their occupation, whatever their degree of cultivation. We cannot get away from it; no melancholic despair is a justification for neglecting

* Ainger's Sermons at the Temple, p. 235.

Digitized by Google

it, no amount of knowledge will enable us to dispense with it, no advance in cultivation will free us from the absolute necessity of keeping our lives ruled by it. One rule, and one alone, will bring the soul into harmony with perfect righteousness, and that is, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

Digitized by Google

# *THE ATONEMENT.*

"Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness."—1 ST. PETER ii. 24.

THERE is no subject so surrounded with difficulty and so fruitful of misrepresentation as the one which Passion Sunday suggests—the Atonement effected for us by Christ on the Cross. No thoughtful man can fail to be struck by the intense moral difficulties which its ordinary and naked presentment involves, and even when he has forced his way beyond them to some more rational standpoint, he still sees only a little light that is ever shading into mysterious darkness. If there is any subject which demands in a Christian teacher reverence and modesty, and a profound conviction that he "knows in part," and that "he sees through a glass darkly," it is surely this. At the best our standpoint of "knowledge is like a little island floating in a sea of mystery." *

* "The Atonement," *Expositor*, 1st series, vol. ii. p. 228, to which article I wish to express my obligations.



Digitized by Google

But what we can see and know, we ought to look at, to study, and to ponder. Though our knowledge is limited, because we soon get to the end of the region in which knowledge is possible, yet it is the fact that the motives which such knowledge of the Atonement as is possible can give us, are and have been proved to be the most powerful that can affect mankind. And therefore one is bound to preach about it, because of its immense difficulty and yet its far-reaching importance.

In the New Testament the Cross of Christ is put before us in three ways—as a sacrifice for sin, as a revelation of God, and as a motive-power. We are bound to consider it in each of these ways if we want to arrive at the utmost limit of our knowledge, and at the results it is meant to achieve for us.

I. The most difficult side of the Atonement to speak of is unquestionably the first. It has created most difficulties, for it is just the one upon which the popular theology is most apt to insist as the only aspect, and to endeavour to explain by the most bald literalism. Men are constantly and confidently invited to trust in the propitiation offered by Christ; it is the theme of every street-preacher: "Trust in the propitiation of the Son, and you will be forgiven, you will be reconciled to God." That is the gospel, the good news, so the popular theology tells us; we must

Digitized by Google

trust in the propitiation offered by Christ, and all will be well.

Now, I am very far from wishing to deny that even this naked and one-sided way of stating things has not been, is not, and will not be the greatest comfort and blessing to many humble souls who fight their way to the innermost truth, and discard by a Divine instinct the ghastly setting that often surrounds this teaching. Such a statement gives them a rest, a feeling of at-homeness with the world out of sight, a ground to go upon; and consequently this aspect of the Atonement has taken a great hold on the English mind—so much so that it is the only aspect insisted on by a large, if not a growing, section of the Church of England, and by the great body of Nonconformists. It has taken a powerful hold on strong vigorous natures, of which the character of Dinah in "Adam Bede" is a type and an illustration. It is only dangerous when it is stated in a bald fashion, or dealt with to the exclusion of the other side.

The deadly mistake is to think as some who are alive to this danger do—that they can counteract its very obvious tendencies and its mischievous antinomian results by ignoring it altogether, and by depreciating its real place in New Testament teaching. There it is no doubt stated over and over again—

Digitized by Google

stated and left without explanation—that "Christ died for our sins," that He "offered Himself for us." Out of these texts and undoubted truths men have constructed a theory which, held nakedly by itself, is capable of being perverted in a most dangerous fashion. Out of it come such statements as that "Doing is a deadly thing," or that "Since Christ has done everything for us, we really dishonour the fulness of His work by trying to live a good life."

But mischievous as this is (and those of you who have seen much of the effects of this kind of teaching among Nonconformists in the West of England and in Wales, or have ever known the after-results of a Ranters' meeting in a country village where the religious emotions have been excited, will know how mischievous it often is)—mischievous as this is, it is only the natural consequence of overstatement, with which we are familiar in other things. The way to meet it is to say "There is this side of things, and it is most true, but it is not the only side." If the Cross reveals God's mercy, it reveals His justice also. It is pressed upon us over and over again in the New Testament, not as something only to trust in, but to measure ourselves by, and to work from. Yet there is this side also, and its prominence is unquestionable. Christ did die for us, and made by His one oblation a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for

Digitized by Google

the sins of the whole world. Deeply mysterious as this side of things is—yes, deeply mysterious, for it affects the interior relations of the Father and the Son —it asserts that the Father accepted the death, or the obedience pushed unto death (in the fullest form), of the Son as a propitiation for our sins. It comes to this, that without the Cross the Love of God could not have reached us. If we think what it really means, we see how deep a mystery this statement involves.

I confess that, to my mind, all ways of endeavouring to explain this great mystery as regards its heavenward aspect seem to fail in satisfying our reason, and often only succeed in landing us in greater bewilderment. How the willing death of the Son affected the mind of the Father towards all His brethren, in what way the relations between the Father and the Son were modified by it, seems to me inexplicable. I can see lights, but only lights, and lights are not explanations. We can see, for instance, that sin deserves punishment; that suffering is its just result, its inevitable consequence tied to it; that, if God does not assert this principle by always punishing sin, He must assert it some other way; and it belonged to Christ, as Head of the race and as moral Ruler of mankind, to have that principle asserted in His own Person on behalf of His brethren—this

Digitized by Google

was "the cup" that did not "pass from" Him, that belonged to Him: that He took suffering on Himself, lest it should reach His brethren. That statement, carefully guarded, any one can accept; but that is a very different conception from the arbitrary substitution by the Father of one innocent for all the guilty, to which the popular theology often reduces it.

Again, we can get another light, and escape the serious difficulties that ensue from the bald statement that the Son appeased the wrath of the Father —a coarse and repulsive form of literalism which results in tritheism, or at least in the danger of conceiving a divided will in the Godhead Itself. You can escape this danger by dwelling on the fact, the undoubted fact, that the Atonement is the work of the Father as well as of the Son; an offering made by the Father when "He spared not His only Son." There was ever, even in the darkest moment of apparent desertion,—there was ever a mysterious union between the Father and the Son, which rendered it possible for God "at once to endure and to inflict suffering, and to do both under conditions which constitute both the infliction and the endurance to be the grandest moment in the moral history of God." These are glimpses into the mystery, but they do not explain the inexplicable. We can only say God has revealed to us that He,

Digitized by Google

for Christ's sake, forgives sins; and we can see two or three things which help us a little to understand why it was necessary that Christ should voluntarily suffer so much. But directly we have said that, we feel that the full knowledge of this mystery is beyond us; that it is "dark with excess of light;" that it is so high we cannot reach it, and so wide we cannot grasp it. We cannot solve it, we cannot understand the unfathomable nature and ways of God; we can see a little way, enough to show us how much more there is to be seen. Is it not fitting that it should be so? for a God we could comprehend and understand would be no God to us. He would be even less than one of ourselves; for it is true of the deepest natures we know, that we cannot always comprehend or understand them.

But this is not all; we can find in the New Testament other aspects of the Cross more within the bounds of our comprehension than this one we have been looking at. The Cross of Christ reveals the Father; it uncovers, unveils the eternal Love of God for men. When we drink in its full meaning, we feel that the prayer, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," has been justified and answered.

The Cross shows us the Father, shows us Him Whom men had misconceived. For what was the root-fault of all religions that preceded Christ? It

Digitized by Google

was that they did not believe that God loved them. They thought of Him as an offended and austere Being, who needed to be appeased by gifts and sacrifices before He could be gracious to them. Christ came, above all, to reveal the Father; to say, "He that hath the Son hath the Father;" and He came to convince men that they had misconceived the Father. He came to teach them that God would Himself make the Atonement which they had thought He was bent on demanding, to assure them that His love for them had never ceased, and would never loosen its hold. He unveiled the hidden Love of God. He showed how far it would go, how much it would bear and do; that men might again be reconciled to Him who had been calling them ever since the Fall, "My child, My child, why hast thou forsaken Me?" *

The passages which speak to us of God "sparing not His only Son," of God "commending His love to us," will serve to bring this aspect to our minds, and it will balance the other one. We can feel at home here. We know what love is. We can conceive, even if we have not known for ourselves, how disinterested, how unselfish pure love may be. We have read or heard of it; and therefore, when we are told that God loves us, and that the Cross is His

* H. S. Holland, "Good Friday," p. 44.

Digitized by Google

own witness how much He loves us, we have something intelligible to lay hold of. Tell a man that God forgives him for the sake of Christ's death, and he gratefully accepts a deliverance from a sense of guilt; but if that is all you tell him, he will not be likely to keep from sin in the future. But tell him that God gave His only and beloved Son to live and die, that He might show how utterly He loves him, how ready He is to forgive and bless him, and he understands you. Tell him that the greatest grief he can cause God is to live a selfish, careless life, and that God looks for an answer because He cares for it, and you lay in his heart the foundations of a responsive love which will spring up and cleanse his whole nature.

For the Cross tells us of a Love with which there is no time. It is a Love that always lives, and that is always prepared to do as much as Christ did. We are told over and over again that the sacrifice of Christ is a solitary act never to be repeated; that its efficacy is inexhaustible. We accept that truth; but we have no right to assume that no other similar manifestation of Divine Love will ever shine on us. For the Love once manifested still exists, and the only question about its manifestation is the need that exists.* If it is needed it will be manifested in as

* Cf. *Expositor, supra*, p. 238.

Digitized by Google

conspicuous a fashion, though in another way, as on Mount Calvary.

Here is our hope for all who go hence in ignorance of their true life; for all who have missed their way. We know nothing about them but this—that nothing is impossible which the Love of God can do. The Cross teaches us that Love as pure, and deep, and self-sacrificing, and willing to receive as that manifested on Calvary, is ever * in God, and is in all ways and at all times ready to manifest itself to His creatures.

But even this aspect of the Atonement has its characteristic dangers. Just as those who think of Christ's Cross only as a deliverance may say, "He has paid the penalty, and I take the reward," and so sink into immoral selfishness, so those who think of Christ's Cross only as a manifestation of the Love of God, may come to rely on that Love without any adequate attempt to respond to it. One of the chief sneers ever levelled at Christians has been that they "hold a creed which persuades them that they may be delivered from punishment without being delivered from sin," or which quickens in them "a weak sentiment incapable of producing the elements of a righteous and manly character," and therefore we must speak of the Cross not only as a

* Cf. Rev. v. 6; xiii. 8.

Digitized by Google

sacrifice and a revelation, but also as a motive-power. There we understand it most easily. To quicken the love within us, to make us glow with responsive emotion, is the moral effect of the Cross of Christ.

The sacrifice of Christ breaks the power, heals the wounds, washes away the stains of sin, through inspiring within man a love which is the result of its own inspiration.

All the phrases in the New Testament about "washing away sin," "cleansing by the blood of Christ," become unintelligible directly we lose sight of this aspect of the Cross, which gives them their real meaning. Blood does not cleanse literally; it defiles and stains. To wash a man in blood is not to cleanse him, but to make him foul; but when we understand that the blood stands for the life freely offered, the sacrifice, and that that sacrifice manifests the Love of God, then Love kindles a responsive love in its objects, and this God-given Love, inspired within us, is a fountain which heals wounds, and cleanses and washes away the stains of sin.

We all know what the love of man for man, when really enkindled, can do to make life new, and so we are able to see how the love of man for Christ, really enkindled, can change man, and can break the power of evil habit, and in that true way deliver him from evil.

Digitized by Google

I am far from saying that these three aspects are the only ones, but all I insist on is that no view of the Atonement is complete that leaves out any of them. There is the heavenward aspect—the action towards God—there is the revealing aspect, and there is the moral, and to leave out either of the three, or to subordinate it, is to get into confusion.

One simple word more. "I believe," we say, "in the forgiveness of sins." It is a great creed. Let us not narrow it as though it meant, "I believe in being let off what I deserve to suffer." What we really want we shall find. In Christ's Cross alone is deliverance —deliverance not from future punishment, but from present evil within; "such a forgiveness of sins as shall really cleanse us from them, and fix and establish in us the love and service of God." * Not to see our punishment, by some quasi-legal fiction, transferred to another who has not deserved it, not even to be let off what we deserve, but to be cleansed from the sin we hate, and from the misery and degradation it involves; to secure that peace and blessedness which is the consequence of right doing, and of that only; to be fixed in goodness, so that we may not be tortured by evil desire and longing for wicked gratifications. That is what we really want. And this, and nothing less than this, is for every one of us the Will of the Father, as declared by the Cross of Christ.

* *Expositor, supra,* p. 244.

Digitized by Google

## *THE EXPEDIENCY OF CHRIST'S ASCENSION.*

"It is expedient for you that I go away."—ST. JOHN xvi. 7.

THERE are a large number of minds to whom this saying, if they ever think of it as meaning something real—which is the hard thing for many religious persons to get to—must be the most unintelligible thing in the world. That Christ should close His work on earth with a departure commensurate with the greatness of His work; that "the eternal gates should lift up their heads;" that the cry should now go up, "This is the King of Glory;" that that solemn upward movement should continue within the veil while He ascended "far above all principality and power," above the nine-fold choirs of angels and every created thing, this is to them fitting and expedient enough, for their minds are devout, and they see the fitness of the present glory of Him "Who endured the Cross, despising the shame." They are

Digitized by Google

carried away to-day by the enthusiasm of the Church as expressed in the prophetic language of the Psalter;* they rejoice in the Ascension as a great and solemn act of reparation to Him who tasted of all the bitterness, the scorn, the shame, and death for man's sake. All this is clear to them; they keep Ascension Day; they are lifted up by it; they would not, for the day, wish it otherwise, for they are capable of unselfishness for one day; they can rejoice for His sake, because "He goes to the Father," though they "see Him no more." But to-morrow, and the next day, and the next, they will go back and nurse their own wounds, and repine and wish that it were otherwise, and that He would come back and lift up His hand and bring them peace, and tell them what to do and what to think about the things that puzzle them, and guide and protect and fence them round, and keep these dark lurid doubts, and these gloomy, hard temptations away from them. If they could see Him and talk to Him, and hear what He said, it would be well—all would be well; but to be told that it is better not, that "it is expedient for them that He should go away," is a hard saying. They cannot make up their mind to be ruled by an invisible King; they must have at least an earthly Pope—infallible or otherwise—to put in His place; they must have a system

* Liddon's University Sermons, No. ix. (1st series).

Digitized by Google

complete in all its parts; they must have certainty and fixed regions, out of which it is forbidden to stray; they must know what to do, and in doing that they would feel safe.

Now, one may analyze this state of mind, and call it weak or materialistic, but that does not help it much. Is there any light on it? Is there any way in which some higher thought may come in and take this craving for certainty, and make it more endurable? First of all, it needs to get this clear—we all want to get it clearer—that the aim of religion, of Christ's work, is not to make us feel happier, so as to be in a perpetual state of buoyant elation (which state, in people who have it, is chiefly physical, is more the result of nerves and digestion than of anything else)—not to feel happier, nor always even to do right things, though doing is an advance upon feeling; but the final aim of Christ's work, both when in sight amid the disciples and out of sight now, is to help us to *be* good, *i.e.* to be different in ourselves, not to make the fruit good, but the tree, and the tree, when it is good, must take its share of sleet and east wind. To be good, not merely to feel good or to do good, but to reflect God, to be different in our inmost selves, so that everything we do and feel is coloured by it, that is the end, the aim and object of Christ's work for us, and all our efforts that confine themselves to

Digitized by Google

our actions or our observances and that do not take account of this, are sure to end in grief and failure. Now, to help men to "be," you must deal with them by quite different means from those you would use if you want to help them to "do" or to "feel." If you want to make them "feel," you would work on their emotions, you would read them a tragic passage or sing them a pathetic song; if you want to make them "do," you stand over them while they do it, or at least superintend them; but if you want to make them "be" anything, both pathetic passages and standing over them would be inadequate to help them. You must get some lifting power to work on them; you must construct a bridge between the natural and the spiritual, so that the spiritual may flow into the natural; you must try them in difficult circumstances, leave them alone sometimes, let virtue be put to the proof, let trial come and test them, and then, not only does their *being* what they are come out, but it grows and is strengthened and ripened. That is a very simple fact of experience; we all apply it to boys, at any rate, in order to produce a healthy, vigorous manhood, and on the whole, experience justifies our wisdom. It must be very hard to be a real mother, and to have to feel that the strong young life you have watched from infancy is better away from you; that it can only

Digitized by Google

hope to be all you hope for it by being sent to a public school, *i.e.* immersed in what must seem to an anxious mind a sea of temptation, with a perpetual liability to failure or accident. Yet we know that those mothers do most for their sons who make up their minds to it, and that, strange as it seems, they do more for them by the thousand chords of sympathy, and by the tender remembrances which the thought of their love and care awakes, than they ever could do by their presence. With all reverence, let us get to know the truth, that, if protecting love ever is to do its full work and have its full result, not on mere doing, but on what is far deeper, on "being," *i.e.* on character, it is expedient for its object that it should go away. Nor do we only know the truth in this striking instance. All of us who have any sensibility, if we have not blunted and deadened it, and who are alive to the advance or deterioration of others, know it, that even in the closest intimacy, even in the most perfectly smooth relationships, even in those which bring high spiritual help, something distinct is gained always by absence that is never gained by presence, even if it is only an increased appreciation and a ripened confidence. Of course, the hardest way of learning it is when death comes and produces that lifelong separation which must often seem to leave so cold and hard



Digitized by Google

a blank behind it; but even there, in the hardest case, how often have we learnt things about people by thinking of them after they were dead, that we never could learn while they were close to us. I do not mean only that we have learnt to make allowances for them, but we have learnt to appreciate and value things in them which, when they were present, were clouded and dimmed by the brightness of their presence; we have learnt sometimes the highest lesson of all about human love—that its present sympathy is but a point of departure, and that its progress is only to be found in that communion which is possible in Him in Whom "all spirits live," and that its goal is in that final re-embrace over which neither time nor change have any power.*

And if we know these things to any extent about this life, it becomes more possible to understand our Lord when He represents to us His Ascension into heaven as a gain to us, and says to us, "It is expedient for you"—for you, not that you may feel happy or do certain things and count yourselves My followers, but that you may be your best selves—"that I go away." For the transformation of the inmost character, His unseen Presence, brought to us and made energetic by the action of the Holy Spirit, works more powerfully than if He were here among

* Illingworth's "Sermons," p. 23.

Digitized by Google

us to solve all doubts and clear up all perplexities. His unseen Presence makes demands upon, and brings out from us something better, touches greater depths within us, and the doubts and perplexities He allows are part of our trial, "the furnace to purify the gold;" and if He were here to clear them up, the highest work would be left undone, man's highest possibilities would lie dormant, for faith would be impossible. In that one word "faith" we get at the root of the whole matter. If His Presence were not unseen, if we had certainty as to action and a fixed rule with no possibility of deviation, faith would not, it could not, even exist on its higher side, for faith is realization of things hoped for and insight into things invisible; it sees what is out of sight as though it were here—it sees Him in His invisible Presence, and it brings a far greater blessing than sight: "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed." Faith is the one characteristic which raises man above the animal, above the natural, without which he cannot "please God" or be of any use to men. It sees in darkness, it believes without evidence, it is certain of the impossible, it is the highest reflection of Divine power within men. Faith as a moral faculty puts you face to face with the treasures of the universe; and where others see nothing you see everything; where others see only bands of Syrians, you see the

Digitized by Google

angels of God; where others see a blind force, you see the workings of a right loving Will, overruling all things. And you are rich for the sight; you grow, you increase, you become more and more conscious of the possibilities of your own life and of the universe, and you grow into the possibilities which you see. But without faith, you grovel through a purblind, naked, starved, diseased existence, seeing emptiness everywhere, because you are so empty; seeing darkness in every noble deed, because you are so dark; seeing all things dead or dying, because you have no life in you, with no soul for greatness in man or in the history of your race, with no enthusiasm, no stirring within you at great and enthralling sights, but dull, barren, poor, weak, and that because you have no faith, no insight, and therefore no goodness. For faith is one of the indispensable conditions of real goodness. And it is hard to be full of faith now so as to see; it is not hard to be full of mere intellectual assent to propositions, but to be full of faith which is insight is so hard, so difficult. And if Christ were not out of sight, if He were still at Jerusalem to be visited and seen and talked to, it would be much harder. It is hard enough now to get to know God by trusting Him, to get the little bits on which we rest our confidence in Him pieced together and find out their relation, but

Digitized by Google

it is possible. As we walk with the unseen Christ, we get surer and surer, but we do so because He is unseen, and so we walk on to that great world where at last we get an answer, where all the little bits of insight and the visions under the fig-tree shall grow together, and we shall see those "greater things," and there will be peace. May God bring us through all our struggles and those partings, which cost us so much, to that full vision. Then we shall see more clearly even than we can now why we rejoice on Ascension Day; then shall we be able to think without the sigh that will linger now even amid the gladness of the Festival, how true, how blessed, how full of wisdom are our Master's words, "It is expedient for you that I go away."

Digitized by Google

## *SORROW AND JOY.*

"Sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing."—2 COR. vi. 10.

THE whole passage which forms to-day's epistle is a remarkable one, as setting forth in a highly dramatic and forcible fashion the character and ideal of St. Paul's ministry. In this description he is again and again landed, as in the text, in an apparent paradox as the only means of expressing himself, "unknown, and yet well known," "dying, and behold we live," "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing," "poor, yet making many rich," "having nothing, yet possessing all things." It is impossible to conceive of expressions more utterly contradictory if we take them in a matter-of-fact and stupid fashion, and yet so fruitful, so suggestive, so luminous, if we follow the thoughts they suggest, and give the best endeavours of our minds to them, if we do not give way to impatience because they are paradoxical in form, and because paradoxes are often affected and unreal. Such expressions are, in fact, a necessity to any real set-

Digitized by Google

ting forth of the Christian life; they are a necessity from the nature of the case, from the fact that the life is too ideal for any other method of expression. You can say about phases of the Christian life two true things which seem contradictory and inconsistent, because the lines of connection are too subtle, too remote, too far off for our sight to be able to follow them into their consistent unity.

I. Paradox is still a necessity in any really high attempt to express the truth about the Christian character; and therefore there is nothing inconsistent or absurd in the fact that you find St. Paul, in the truly magnificent passage before us, revelling in paradox: "deceivers, and yet true," "unknown, yet well known," "dying, and behold we live," "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing," "having nothing, and yet possessing all things." To those who want to bring all moral ideals into leaden iron rules, which will save them the trouble of thinking and make them feel comfortable—to those whose mental vision can conceive of nothing as intelligible that cannot be expressed in the fetters of a syllogism, his language must, one feels, sound absolute nonsense; but St. Paul certainly did not talk nonsense, and his splendid and sublime conceptions of the harmonious synthesis of apparent contradictions are not among the least of the proofs of the depth and profundity of his insight into Christian

Digitized by Google

character. For he is opening out before us that great moral inspiration—for so it becomes—which teaches us to look for perfection in a balance; not in the commonplace, one-sided formula, which leaves nothing to the imagination, which is and remains hard, crude, and barren, but in a harmonious blending into a higher unity of things that in themselves seem altogether, at first sight, opposed and contradictory. Anything else brings us, sooner or later, into over-statements on one side or the other; on any weakening of the tension which paradox expresses, we slide into the easier and lazier course of contenting ourselves with those half-truths which are generally exaggerations—*i.e.* with moral heresy. Intensely opposed at first sight, these states of Christian life seem intensely, even fiercely opposed. What is more opposite than dying, the state of dying, preparing to die, and living with all the intensity of life, or than sorrow and joy, or than absolute want and possession? What, to take our Lord's own great paradox, is more opposite than "saving life and losing it"? But in reality, in fact, these discordant contradictions, directly we come to examine them, blend themselves, and neither of them can be dispensed with without serious loss. So most plainly, in the case before us, "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing:" there must be these strangely discordant elements in any Christian life; it was so with the Master, it must

Digitized by Google

be so with the disciple. If He who "endured the Cross, despising the shame," endured with the "sense of the joy that was set before Him;" if He, around and upon whose inmost Soul was a sense of the thousand failures which His Divine consciousness saw around Him—if He "rejoiced in spirit," this combination cannot be unreal, must be possible. And in some way or other its possibility is proved to us. We begin with exaggeration, and think that, as the Christian life is serious, we must put a fitting gloom on our countenance, and make ourselves a source of woe to those who surround us; but we soon learn, if we have any truth in us, that that life is not a true one or a kind one. Or we crush all deeper thoughts, and give ourselves utterly to the brighter side of things; we recognize the Father's Love, and we revel in our liberty till we wake up and find ourselves in bondage again. All experience goes to prove not only the possibility, but the necessity of the combination, "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing," and though we cannot explain everything and adjust all balances, yet the deeper the misery, the more compensations we become conscious of in the sorrows both of others and ourselves. For if we know anything at all about the power of our life, we know that its greatest power is the result of sorrow; that the tale even of the Divine Love and Pity can only be told, so as to

Digitized by Google

touch the deepest chords, by One who has Himself "suffered being tempted;" that sorrow is the deepest thing in the world, the thing that produces the closest bonds, ties the tightest knots, and has the most lasting of all results. There is a fascination about the presence of sorrow which makes it possible to conceive of compensation, which makes one understand how, in the deep undertone of a life of great sorrows and great faith, the experience, "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing," may be realized, though in the midst of personal loss and trouble and consciousness of evil, and consistently with the deepest sympathy for others.

II. Or take another way in which we see this truth, "Sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing." Sorrow for sin is not the only sorrow; there is also the sorrow of doubt, of perplexity of mind. A man who knows the agony of doubt will never speak of it except with the utmost tenderness. For men in their deepest moments have known and sounded the depths of this sorrow, and into it no joy can seem to enter. To be uncertain of what is true on the most important of all statements; to be tortured by questions and racked by uncertainties; to know the depression, the joylessness of doubt; to toss on one's bed and consider God's dealings, and find no light, and hardly to know where to turn—this surely is the utmost agony, no joy

Digitized by Google

can enter into it. There might be joy if there was help, but where is a man to turn for help? He goes to man, he falls in with some one who seems certain, some dogmatist with his strong assertions, some legalist with his prescription for every mental trouble—his "touch not, taste not, handle not;" he listens to their loud assertions; he is perhaps overborne by their overwhelming positiveness; their voices are loud and their assertions are broad, and he takes refuge, perhaps, in wanton credulity; he is lured for a time into the arms of the most splendid claimant of infallibility, not because he believes she is infallible, but because she is the only system that professes to be so on a sufficiently large scale. But his is no real escape from torture, no exodus from darkness to light; he is sorrowful enough, with no ray of joy, till he gets to see this essential truth—that satisfaction ultimately can only come to a man, not from what some one else believes, but from what he believes and knows himself; that, instead of trying to borrow faith of others, his only real hope lies in maintaining that personal struggle after truth which is man's highest object in life. If only he will set his face Godward and, doing always the highest right he knows, expect not a full system to rush in upon him and answer every question, but be content with glimpses and flashes of light from God Himself,

Digitized by Google

proving to him, first of all, His personal interest, His Love for him; if only he will let Divine tenderness speak, and wait as he waits for tokens of another love—a friend's, who does not make strong assertions, but who shows him his interest in the time of need and difficulty by little tokens of thoughtfulness, so that he knows his friend loves him though he has never said so; if only he will be patient and seek the help he wants from God Himself, and be content to wait and count as precious each gleam of light, each token of tenderness, to wait while God lets His Love "peep through the blanket of the dark," enduring perplexity, seeing a vision, and then perhaps enduring darkness and deadness, but waiting till the flickering flame reappears and grows into a consuming fire, then perhaps at the very end the day will dawn and he will see and know, not because of any one's saying, but for himself, that "this is the Christ Who has come into the world." But to demand satisfaction, to beat against heaven till it discloses itself, to ask questions of impatience, and then to assume there is no answer because none comes at once, this is childishness too shallow for that real sorrow which alone can be turned into joy.

Brethren, in the days of sorrow and of doubt "lift up your eyes unto the hills from whence cometh your help." Clouds may hang there, mists may deepen,

Digitized by Google

but it is there, after patient waiting, that you learn the joy that only cometh after "the heaviness of the night," to those who wait, and hope, and treasure each streak of light, and who know that it can and will only come from heaven. They, and only they who seek light in the true fashion, and who realize at once the agony of doubt and the joy of increasing certainty, are "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing."

III. Lastly, "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing." It is difficult to set before you the possibility, the beauty of this paradox, in the face of mourning round us which makes all our hearts heavy. But in thinking of those dead,* whose going from us wrings all our hearts so sorely; of those who, among us a few months ago, yet counted not their lives dear unto them so that they might do the right that lay before them, does there not come to each one of us the joy, amid our sorrow, that the true heroism of self-devotion, the going before others to death, is still possible among us? And is it not something too, amid our sorrow, to see and feel that a high civilization, with its ease and luxury, has not so entirely corrupted our national life, but that we can still send forth one from among us who recalls all the brightest and noblest traditions of chivalry, who combines with the force and the strength that made him able to spend those long

* Preached during the war in the Soudan.

Digitized by Google

weeks and months of solitude, the simplicity and the disinterestedness of a little child?

Men will think and feel about Gordon, it has been truly said, according to the depth of their natures. A life like his is a test—men's reflections on it are a judgment on themselves. Some will display infinite pettiness by thinking and speaking of his eccentricities, of those limitations which he shared with every son of Adam; they will dwell on them, and lose the lesson of his great and noble life. Others will simply mourn him as a brave soldier, or even use the tragic circumstances of his death to lend some assistance to their petty political antagonisms; they too will lose the lesson of a great and noble life. But there are surely those who will realize, in thinking of him, something of the possibility of that paradox I have been drawing out to-day, "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing." Let us be among those who see the true greatness of the man, transfigured as it is into brightness by the tragic circumstances of his death, betrayed like his Master by one whose treachery he had known and forgiven. On that greatness let us concentrate our thoughts, as the one essential element in our view—devotion to God, devotion to duty as God's work; all else was but dung to him, if he might anywhere, alone or with others, serve God and his fellow-men for God's sake. Over him fear,

Digitized by Google

the fear of treachery, had no power; he gave himself to God, and whatever came in the accidents of the hour, for that he was prepared.

Surely as we leave him, our great Christian hero of modern times, in that world of spirits into which He to Whom he devoted his life has already welcomed him—surely we know something more of the Divine truth of this paradox, "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing," of joy, even amidst our sorrow, that such a life as his was possible amid much that seems so contrary around us; surely it is something to feel that this single-minded devotion to mankind is something to remember of which nothing can rob us; surely we can try to learn from him, not only courage and wisdom and strength, but that higher self-devotion so fully exhibited in him, that higher self-devotion to Christ and his brethren which will be the best of all testimonies that, as far as we are concerned, he did not live and die in vain.

Digitized by Google

## *THE COURAGE OF THE SAINTS.*

"That I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."—EPH. vi. 20.

WE have been reading in this morning's first lesson the story of three brave men, of men who were ready to expose themselves to the most cruel and painful of deaths because they persisted in worshipping God, and refused to bow down to the golden image even when it was set up by royal authority. It does not affect their courage at all that they were delivered; the fact remains, that sooner than do what conscience and the Will of God forbade them, they consented to be cast into a furnace. And it is good for us to hear their story. Not that the circumstances are likely to reproduce themselves; the days of that kind of coercion, at any rate, are over. The conscience of the community is so opposed to any religious persecution that it will allow a public nuisance in the streets sooner than interfere with religious liberty. No doubt the persecuting spirit is not wholly dead; there are men among us who may

Digitized by Google

be still not unwilling to burn heretics, or at any rate to torture mildly the unorthodox ; but they are kept in check by public opinion to too great an extent to allow of their seriously proposing it. And outside this, wherever there is mere party spirit in religion, mere belief in a system instead of in the living Father, there is the persecuting spirit. There are men and women who still use such weapons of bigotry as they can, who injure and pain those from whom they differ, by hard words and cold looks, who are ready to clutch at any slander about a man whose creed is different to their own, who, instead of attacking the real beliefs of others, first travesty those beliefs and then knock down the travesty they have set up. Yes, people do still "suffer for righteousness," in quiet homes and in public work-places ; the persecuting spirit is driven into corners, but it still snaps and snarls and bites when it dares ; and wherever it is, and wherever it shows itself, it always requires one thing to meet it—viz. courage, boldness. To be "cast into the burning fiery furnace" of the attacks of a so-called religious newspaper, or the spiteful tongues of rancorous partisans, is still a trial of our courage.

And at times it is very difficult to be brave, to stand alone, to be true to conscience and duty, and the voice of God. Because it is so hard, the Bible



Digitized by Google

is full of the stories of men who were brave in this way: Moses confronting Pharaoh, David going forth to meet Goliath, Elijah being faithful with Ahab, Daniel in the den of lions, to say nothing of the seven thousand whose names are unknown, yet who would not bow the knee to Baal.

The history of the cause of God, of the triumphs of justice, righteousness, and goodness, is the history of brave men's lives—the history of those who had eyes to see below the surface, who were not ashamed of His cause when numbers, or power, or intellect were against it, and who without boasting were not afraid to tell men which side they were on. The history of the cause of God is the history of men who feared only one thing, viz. to be untrue to themselves, and therefore, untrue to God; all who fear aught else are sure to be first deserters, then traitors.

So it has been, so it is, so it must be. Times have changed, certain forms of persecution have passed away, but two elementary conditions always remain the same—one is, the voice of God calling us to mount higher at whatever cost; the other is, the heart of man that shrinks from the shame, the ridicule, and abuse which must so often accompany any aspiring effort. We must pay a price for everything that is worth having; every moral and spiritual

Digitized by Google

advance, every buying up of an opportunity costs something, and willingness to pay the price means courage, courage that is founded upon faith, boldness that endures as "seeing Him who is invisible." We all need to pray that we may not only speak "boldly as we ought to speak," but bear and act bravely as we ought to for the cause of God. His plan for our lives is perpetually pointing one way, but it is a way that puts us into positions that demand just as much courage as in the old days of persecution. "I will not fear what man can do unto me," is easy to say when the police are there to guard your life and property, but is it easy to say, "I will not fear what man can say of me; I will not fear misrepresentation of motives or envenomed slander?" How many people here have said to others, "If I did this or that which I felt right, people might say such and such things!" How many more have unconsciously glanced at that motive, and then invented some plausible excuse for not doing something they ought to do! Unless men recognize a higher rule than the convenience of the moment, it is sure to be so. We feel lonely without the approval of our own circle, and from loneliness we all shrink; we yearn for sympathy. It is quite a true feeling, quite a holy one, but, like every true feeling, it needs to be controlled. To depend on sympathy as a necessity is not to lay

Digitized by Google

the foundations of a very true and real life; there is always the danger that when we ought to choose between the judgment hall where Christ is, *i.e.* the call of duty, and the fireside where Peter was, *i.e.* sympathy, we shall choose the fireside. Hence Christ's warning, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me." The lower tie must be sacrificed, broken, that one day it may be restored and placed upon a divine basis. Those whom we grieve will one day love us much better when they see why we acted so strangely, as they thought, in obedience to a higher law. They may misunderstand and be hurt with us now; but one day they will see, and then we shall get all the old love back, and in a far deeper way than if we had basely yielded to a mere desire for present sympathy. It is quite natural to feel deeply the withdrawal of sympathy, but quite necessary to be prepared to forego it. But to do so wants courage. Indeed, it is difficult to say how much courage it wants to forfeit or imperil the sympathy of those for whom we care, when God's voice calls us along a path that is unwelcome to them, or to a course which they do not understand. Only those who have the spirit of the three children, of Daniel, of St. Paul, of Wickliffe, of Savonarola, of Huss, the spirit that they showed in such splendid fashion amid such bitter circum-

Digitized by Google

stances; only those who have "that within them that endureth," will submit to be called with them presumptuous or heretics, or forsaken of God; only those who deepen their hold on the invisible world, who are not alone because the "Father is with them," can stand brave and firm even in the simplest issue.

In some form, then, or another, in misrepresentation, in loss of sympathy, or in loneliness, there is always enacted the story of the three children. In every generation there is its golden image, its fetishes and formulas; in every generation, there are the conventional accompaniments, cornet, harp, flute, etc., the voices of the fetish-worshippers; in every generation, in some form or another, there is the burning fiery furnace, the cauldron of misrepresentation, of biting sneers, of silent contempt, or, what is hardest to bear, of estranged sympathy; and the only possible way of becoming bold and courageous enough to face them, is to believe in God, to deepen our hold on things invisible. Faith in something and enthusiasm for something, makes life worth looking at; you feel it directly. A man who believes in himself, or a woman who believes in pleasure, is a flat and unprofitable and unelevating spectacle; but faith and enthusiasm are more than interesting features of character—they are the materials out of which all that is great is built up.

Digitized by Google

"I believe in God," we said this morning; we say it every Sunday; it may be said thoughtfully, but it is often said as if it were the most superfluous statement, the most matter-of-course thing in the world, and yet the words represent the hardest of all beliefs—the one great difficulty, which, when once surmounted, makes all else easy to follow it up. Let us expand it a little. "I believe in God," and therefore I believe that the law of His being is good, is the embodiment of goodness, and apart from that law there is neither well-being nor happiness for the world. "I believe in God," *i.e.* I try to be like Him, in what is His essential and innermost excellence—to be good. I wish to have no higher or lower ideal than to love Him and my neighbour as myself. To believe in God is to be filled with a sense of the loveliness of goodness, and of the ugliness of sin; to believe in God is to see, in the gratification of our lower impulses, in the yielding to an easy creed and a comfortable moral standard, something that is inexpressibly lowering and deteriorating; to believe in God is to have the sense that we, whatever we do, say, think, or suffer, are objects of an overwhelming and most sympathetic interest to Him Who rules the world; to believe in God is to have before one's eyes a higher tribunal, to submit one's acts to Him, to fear only His displeasure, and so in all things to

Digitized by Google

have one's feet upon a rock. And therefore to believe in God is to grow brave; to shut our ears when the world's heralds cry to us to bow down to their image; to say, with the strength that comes of belief in God, We will not do this, we cannot—if you like, we dare not, though, better still, we cannot bear to—because we believe in God.

Ah! some one will say, if only the issue would come in a clear fashion—in the concrete shape of a burning fiery furnace on one side, and denying God and parting with good on the other,—if only the issue were not so perplexed and conflicting, one might make the big plunge and sacrifice all; but these little issues escape our notice, slip through our fingers, and, like Peter, we deny Christ, while we are warming ourselves at the fire and talking with some maid.

Brethren, we are all wrong when we let ourselves think so. It shows that we know nothing of the conditions of our warfare. It is not for us to choose the battle-field. Christ did not; we cannot. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master." It shows, too, that we know nothing of the overmastering tendency of our daily decisions. If we forget God, if we compromise every time it is disagreeable to say or do what we ought to, then, however clear the issue, we should always find some reason for yielding to the fascinations of the golden image. Men who demand

Digitized by Google

great occasions because they are not equal to small ones, show a want of self-knowledge which is utterly ludicrous, if it were not so terribly deceptive. No; it is what costs you a little to-day, the brave word, the determined silence when holy things are discussed irreverently, or things of which it is "a shame even to speak" are lightly spoken of, the refusal to compromise a clear issue, the controlled temper, the resolve to be fair, not to be a partizan or a shouter with any crowd, the strength to look behind temptation on the vision of God's goodness, that will get you ready for the great issue if it comes.

There is much in the social atmosphere of our day that makes these considerations very pertinent ones. The destructive criticism of our day has had its good side. It has cleared the air; it has forced those who believe to surrender untenable positions; it has done an indirect service to the Christian cause by directing attention to what is essential in that position; it has to some extent stopped the growing tendency of theology to put inferences into the place of first principles. One must take a fair view, and, even in a transition period, as wide a one as one can, in order to understand a position, and it is an utter mistake to meet the destructive criticism with abuse and misrepresentation, or to call a man infidel or atheist because he expresses a doubt about the his-

Digitized by Google

torical accuracy of the Old Testament; it is only more unutterably wicked than it is positively foolish. Let us be fair and just; let us meet those who oppose us like honest men, without raising a cloud of dust of irrelevant issues. Certainly that is not to "speak boldly as we ought to speak." And let us recognize the fact, that for any honest doubt we can have nothing but sympathy. There is something inexpressibly pathetic in the account of De Tocqueville * when he was asked to class human miseries, at first putting them thus: (1) disease; (2) death; (3) doubt; while later on in life, he altered their order and put doubt first. It is impossible not to sympathize with real difficulties. On the other hand, the destructive criticism has made it very difficult for Christians to be brave. The sense that clever men think every position open to serious question or decided against them, takes the heart out of people who know that they are not clever; it is like trying to build straight while there is an earthquake going on in the ground. And not only directly, but indirectly, destructive criticism produces a type of character which often makes courage difficult. There is an easy dillettantism which often poses as a philosophical agnosticism, which, while it borrows the plumage of great thinkers, has never known anything of their mental struggles. It hides

* Cf. Morley's "Essays," vol. ii. p. 284.

Digitized by Google

a thinly veiled desire to escape from moral obligations of any kind under the veil of borrowed sarcasms and imperfectly realized arguments. The agnostic of the drawing-room is the outcome of this phase. He is outwardly and at first sight imposing, like the strange bird in Aristophanes' amusing comedy, but like that bird, on closer inspection, becomes rather a sad and sorry object, not dangerous to religion that is based on reality, but often terribly disturbing to timid persons or mere believers in their party system as distinct from believers in God. He is welcome in certain circles, where things in heaven and on earth and under the earth are discussed with the desire to know, not "what is true, but what is said;" where "a new idea about God is handed round the company, as ladies in Queen Anne's day handed round a black page or a china monster." * But to any one who has any sense of the real heart-troubles that come out of perplexities around us; to any one who knows what a support, in spite of all difficulties, the sense of God's love and care in trouble is; to any one who seeks Him, such a man is a mere bundle of useless affectations, a mere patterer, who, when he airs his doubts, only proclaims his own blindness and his own want of insight. Such as he is, however, he is a sore trial to the courage of some, and his sneers are the

* J. Morley's "Essay on Mill," vol. i. p. 89.

Digitized by Google

poor and paltry modern substitute for the burning fiery furnace, his sarcasms represent the orchestral accompaniment with which the worship of the golden image of unreality is surrounded. Even to meet him you want exactly the same thing which the three children in the furnace had, *i.e.* you want courage, boldness; not merely a controversial spirit, a dialectical anxiety to confute an opponent, but you want the courage that comes from a sense that the "Father is with you," that you have seen the other world in your higher moments of spiritual vision, seen it on your knees, realized it in your best moments with not merely a thrill of wonder, but with a sense that *you belonged to it, and it to you;* and that, therefore, wherever you are, whatever be the scene, a den of lions, or a fiery furnace, or some sneering tongue, however sore and shrinking the heart may be, there is always another form, the form like unto the Son of God, that is lifelike and vivid to you.

There are other things that try our courage, but this dillettante agnosticism, with its taste for dinner-table arguments, is to many timid people a formidable foe. Even to meet that spirit needs real courage. Often a man who will face any argument cannot face a sneer. We do not choose our battle-field, else we might ask for a more doughty antagonist. But God's servants cannot choose their own trial; nor can

Digitized by Google

they hope to escape one altogether, and to climb into heaven by a ladder of roses. The social atmosphere is unfavourable to earnestness; it is better it should be so, if we get thereby a more manly, a more self-respecting tone in our religion. It is better, if it brings us to see even by such pitiful examples as it furnishes, that "to have definite beliefs is the highest privilege, and to give them as the something better which we are bound to try and give to those who have worse is the highest duty man can have."* It all makes for reality on the Christian side, and reality is the great want. The man who seeks reality, who works out those beliefs on his knees, will stand the trial of any kind of furnace; he will have the true secret of courage, he will see everything where others see nothing, and be he clergyman or layman, theologian or mechanic, he will, whenever there is an occasion, "speak boldly as he ought to speak."

* "Life of George Eliot," vol. iii. p. 217.

Digitized by Google

## *THE CHILDHOOD OF CHRIST.*

"And the Child grew, and waxed strong in spirit."—ST. LUKE ii. 40.

THERE is something very attractive about the few passages that throw any light on our Lord's early years. There is the general attraction of the Child-nature, always powerful, always morally, when presented to man, a test of character, inasmuch as its interest is so absorbing; and there is the special attractiveness in His case of the thousand difficulties and mysteries that present themselves at every turn. When we consider His Childhood in the light of the union of the two Natures, we are carried at once into a region of parallel straight lines that seem never to meet. On the one side, from His earliest years, from the moment of His birth, the Divine Person was there, the Son of God, the Everlasting; on the other, there were the human conditions of life perfectly united to that Person—not human flesh in which His Godhead dwelt as though it were a soul,

Digitized by Google

but the reasonable Soul, the human Intellect, Heart, and Will, as really and truly human as yours and mine. And so we are landed in a series of apparent paradoxes, especially when we consider His Childhood, that He knew all and yet learnt to know by experience; that His Will was God's Will, and yet learned He, in His human Will, "obedience by the things He suffered;" that His Love was Divine Love, all-embracing, unlimited by time, and yet that He was utterly human in His particular affections and in that which always must be a distinguishing element in human affection, viz. in sympathy for the present distress of others, even when it clouds out, as it were, the future outcome of greater good. All these paradoxes, as they are, when viewed on one side, and most rich and satisfying truths from another, are guarded and fenced and made safe for us in those accurate statements about the Incarnation, which the blood and tears of noble men in the third and fourth centuries won for us, yet which are capable of exposition without any risk of exhaustion to the end of time. And these problems and difficulties that arise about the whole question seem to concentrate themselves with especial power about His early years. Being what He was, God the Son, and knowing what He knew from the first, how could it be said that He "waxed strong in spirit," or that the grace of God was upon Him—or

Digitized by Google

that He "increased in wisdom and in favour with God and man"? How should it not be so, considering He was utterly Divine? Why say anything about favour with God? The answer is, He placed Himself so absolutely at the mercy of all our human conditions of life (save one) that it could not but be told of Him as of any other child. Being very man, He must grow in body, must learn in the natural way, must expand like the flower, perfect at every stage yet increasing in perfection, inasmuch as perfection at a higher stage and under more advanced conditions is a higher perfection than perfection at a lower stage of being. All that real knowledge which comes not from intuition, but from experience, that knowledge so impossible to forestall even in the conception of what it is like (as we know when in later life we look back)—all such knowledge He chose to gain, all knowledge of what others are when man is subject to them or placed in a position of inferiority to them,—a knowledge a child gains slowly and with too often many, many painful episodes, a knowledge unique and peculiar, a knowledge of the laws and nature of subjection—a knowledge, too, of the ways in which things expand as we expand and grow into them, so that nature is one thing to a child and another to a man. These are some of the lines on which we may think the thing out, not as exhausting the

Digitized by Google

inexhaustible, but as leading us to thoughts about Him which, as long as they are reverent, are always useful both to ourselves for our own sake and to ourselves as influencing those who are younger.

In this way, then, in order to teach us something about that subject ever inexhaustible in interest—the unfolding of life in childhood, and our attitude in whatever capacity, as parents, teachers, or friends towards it, let us look on this subject to-day.

I. "The Child grew." The reserve of the Bible is as marked in its tendency as subsequent legends have been as to theirs. The reserve of the Bible on the subject of our Lord's early Life is far remote from the childish legends with which the imaginative instinct of southern natures has endeavoured to supplement it. But the very simplicity of the two verses and the anecdote which tell almost all we know of that Childhood is as striking and instructive as the fullest details ever could be. "The Child grew." First of all, it tells us He was a Child, and then that He was a Child that grew. There was no forcing about His early years, nothing premature marked His holy and childlike utterances, no unnatural culture stimulated His brain, and left His heart and will to harden.*

* Robertson's "Sermons," vol. ii., No. 15.

Digitized by Google

"The Child grew" as other children, so much like other children, that His brethren were astonished at His fame, and to His fellow-townsmen He was a "Prophet without honour." His Childhood was human and progressive—it was, above all, childlike. It was a period when He too was trained by subjection; when He entered into the performance of filial duties, when He woke to earthly relationships, and all that they implied.

How I wish every parent in this Church to-day, who has young children to bring up, would kneel down and pray over this text, and rise resolved to do their best to let their children put even the first three words of it into practice—to be children and to grow, to be children and not premature little men and women, but children in knowledge of the difficulties of worldly temptation, children in precocity, children even in the childishness of their pleasures! Alas! how modern life is strewn with little dwarfed men and women, instead of children, who will perform before any audience their monkey's tricks, with no relic about them of childlike bashfulness; who are unlike the Child Jesus, in that they are neither children nor do they grow in any sense of the word, but remain, morally speaking, stunted and misshapen dwarfs, with all the bloom of their childlike nature rubbed off them by being made to perform in public and to



Digitized by Google

show off an immature and unripe talent—*e.g.* for playing or singing—merely that foolish flatterers may ruin their simplicity by the soft voice of insincere praise, or help them into the strife of temptation before they can have strength to resist it. What would He Who, being perfect and having all knowledge, yet condescended to learn and to grow and to be hidden and unknown, have said to such scenes as I have witnessed with pain and disgust, of young girls standing up to display their immature talent with unblushing and unmaidenly self-consciousness, not to friends, that is one thing, but to strangers and critics, merely for the sake of that useless bit of insincere flattery that is the reward, such as it is, to the mother who has sacrificed her child as fatally as Jephthah did? What would, what could, He say to such morally stunted dwarfs, with no relic of child-likeness about them? Could we imagine Him ever pointing to them as He pointed to little children, and saying, "Unless you be converted, and become as these little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven?" Rather I seem to hear Him say, "Woe unto you! it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon," for the little unkempt, untaught street Arab, who is a child after all, "in the day of judgment," *i.e.* in the trial of his life, "than for you."

Digitized by Google

Brethren, we live in days when growth seems to be superseded on every side by anxiety for results. All around us are men and women with no insight, no taste for character, who do not see the beauty of the bud gradually unfolding, but who want to tear it open and see what it is, and make it expand in an immature, coarse luxuriance, as something to show, something that will tell. The fatal cry is everywhere for results, and while we ought to be feeding children's bodies and letting their moral and intellectual nature expand, we are harrying them with examinations, and teaching them to be merely showy (for how hard to devise any examination that is a test of anything more?), and morally and intellectually and physically forgetting the conditions of the Divine Life, the Childhood He chose, in which "the Child grew," and so it comes to pass (as has been well said *) that "heart and brain that were meant to last seventy years wear out in twenty-five;" hearts harden and brains get soft at an age when in one and the other maturity would properly be reached, because men and women who have not been children, and have not been allowed to grow and expand, have been forced and crammed with what you will, and morally tempted by applause till their hearts have become like pavement.

* F. W. Robertson, *supra.*

Digitized by Google

The only true idea of education is *growth in the whole nature:* spiritual, physical, moral, and intellectual. Force the intellectual, and you get the injury of over-pressure. Every clergyman knows instances in which intellectual over-pressure does result not merely in injury to the bodily health, but in what comes after it—injury to the spiritual health. No doubt education, as long as it is true to this idea of expansion, is the greatest of blessings, but we all know the old proverb about the corruption of the best, and the modern system of school inspection and competitive examination, as ordinarily conducted, seems to me to have given a new meaning to the proverb. Results are excellent things, no doubt, if your survey is wide enough of them, but the results of modern examinations are likely to be about as useful and lasting as the results of giving a horse twelve feeds of corn every day for a week and no exercise. Let no one misunderstand me, as though I pleaded for ignorance as against education. I plead for growth in the whole nature, not merely on one side of it; and too often men talk of education as if it were only the infusion of the knowledge of facts. Surely the story of Christ's hidden Life for thirty years conveys on this matter, a perpetual lesson! He, with the greatest work before Him, took thirty years to grow into fitness for it. Depend upon

Digitized by Google

it, we need to study this example in an age when high thinking is in danger of disappearing through impatience for results. It suggests the deepest lessons to parents. Let your children be children and grow. Do not stimulate them with artificial culture; teach them not merely facts, but how to *think about facts.* Teach them to aim at depth; artificial culture destroys it. Remember it is character we want to develop, and character wants the depth to grow in which only quiet surroundings will produce.

And this leads me to what I wish to insist on especially, viz. the moral and spiritual side of the subject. How many children are brought up with no instruction in morals save what may be gathered from the fact that if they do wrong they will be punished for it, but why they are punished, and what are the grounds of calling things wrong, they never understand. They have only the fear of punishment before them. Now, of course, punishment has a part, but it is only a subordinate part, in any true system of moral training. A discussion has recently been going on in the papers on the use of the cane as an instrument of punishment. Such discussions (revolting when viewed on one side from the sentimental rubbish which seems incidental to them, and mischievous on the other from the savage assurance which insists that force is the only availing

Digitized by Google

remedy), will arise from time to time, and will end as fruitlessly as they begin, except when attention is called to the root of the matter, which is, of course, not the kind of punishment you use, but the moral disposition of the person who administers it. All punishment becomes immoral in its effects directly it is administered as a mere relief to feelings of selfish anger. It may be a means of repression and may cow a frightened child, but it will never be an instrument of moral growth. Once assume that attitude towards any child, and administer either words of reproof or blows as a relief to your own angry feelings, and every word and blow of yours becomes a curse to yourself and to the child who receives it. Punishment is what those naturally revert to who have neither tact nor sympathy to win, and probably nothing tends so much to mar and destroy the finer elements in a childlike character as unsympathetic punishment. It immediately rouses in a child that sense of injustice which is the strongest motive to rebellion, and though it may be awed for a time, yet it is awed only till that day when it sees some opportunity for reprisal—which is about as immoral a result as can be imagined.

Any men who look back to their boyhood and can remember the feelings they had about masters who punished from mere anger, will know what I

Digitized by Google

mean. Let me try to put the question on its true ground. Punishment is a witness for authority, and in that way a wholesome moral leverage; but directly it becomes a witness for tyranny and savage anger, it stimulates disobedience, it hurts the giver and receiver alike. To be able to punish as a moral being, a man must be self-controlled and self-restrained, and these things are only to be gained by a real humbling of one's self in prayer and self-examination before God in those still moments which are fruitful in hours of action. And punishment at best is only a subordinate instrument of the authoritative relationship; it sinks in a moral system into its own place, not to be put on one side for any merely sentimental reasons, but only to be used when felt to be identical with authority, and when administered out of the deepest sympathy; and then its influence, however exercised, is always in the direction of growth. But as moral influence grows, punishment falls into the background; and moral influence will and must grow wherever men recognize Christ in little children, and try to train themselves to treat them accordingly. And so we reach the root of the matter as regards moral growth. No systems of punishments are of any avail by themselves; they brutalize those who administer and those who are subjected to them; but the Divine secret overwhelms

Digitized by Google

us when we really get to it, for it tells us that a child's moral nature must expand and grow in answer to yours, *e.g.* it will learn to be true not from fear of being punished when it has told lies, but so far as your life is a witness to the power and beauty and majesty of truth, so far as you think and act in accordance with all the realities you can recognize, so long as you show that you hate and abhor and reprobate lies and shams wherever you find them.

II. And so, too, as to what is most difficult to speak of—the growth of the spiritual nature. A child's religion is a wonderful thing; no one who has a heart could listen unmoved to the unself-conscious prayers of a little child; as long as its prayers are spontaneous and instinctive, they are lovely in their exquisite simplicity. But the days of growth have to come, the crisis-moment of temptation—the days when instinct becomes self-conscious; and then there are two things to fear—forcing or crushing. There is that fatal mistake of trying to force a child to use your expressions. The essentially childlike religion is not a dwarfed kind of grown-up religion—the same in sort, but less in quantity and quality; it is lovely and precious, because it is made up of seeds and buds ready to grow, but spoilt if forced into premature activity, or made to use unreal expressions, *e.g.*

Digitized by Google

language about its vileness which it cannot feel to be true. Beware, I say, of forcing.

And beware, too, of crushing. How often is that other danger fallen into of interfering, because there do not seem to be in children strong religious sensibilities, and of treating their religion as therefore unreal! A child may still be at home with God, though its sense of His Presence be too sacred for words, but its sense is far deeper and truer, more part of its nature, than your emotional paroxysms, or your supposed conversion. Beware, lest you "quench smoking flax" by crushing that sense. Again and again seriousness has been forced on children in a way that has saddened their lives and crushed their spirits, and only been banished by a reaction of thoughtlessness, all the more terrible because, humanly speaking, it never would have come, except for the mistaken zeal of parents. "They that loved them did it," is the dreary epitaph.

"The Child grew and waxed strong in spirit." Spiritual strength is not a matter of feelings or of words; it is power of will and of self-restraint; it means strong feelings and firm command over them, and it is reached, not all at once, but by successive steps. Every mastery over self, every little temper striven with, is the signal for fresh strength, for with every slain sin fresh virtue comes into you. And so

Digitized by Google

with children: keep before them, as an ideal, spiritual growth, growth into greater self-control, and so greater liberty; growth into a deepened perception of God's love and protecting care—these things deepen faith far more than any efforts to implant it by merely asking for professions of it.

There are many who understand this, and many, thank God, who act upon it; there are many children brought up as if they were God's children, and who will for ever have to thank God for the training, ay, and the correction which helped and protected the child-likeness, for the moral growth and spiritual increase of their early years. But much that passes for religious education, both public and private, practically ignores this side of letting a child be a child, and of the true lines of early development, and that only too fatally, and if I have spoken strongly to-day it has not been without reason and without consideration.

God only grant that those of us who in any way —clergy, teachers, and above all parents—who have those precious young lives intrusted in any way to us, may realize the extent of our responsibility. May God so guard and guide us that we may be saved from that most awful of fates foretold to those who offend them, a millstone of our own selfish folly ever round our necks; God so strengthen us in self-control that

Digitized by Google

we may do our parts, whatever they be, in this greatest and holiest of works, so that when we give up our trust at the foot of His everlasting Throne, we may not be ashamed to say, "Behold I and the children whom Thou hast given me."

Digitized by Google

# *THE REAL MEANING OF SUFFERING.*

"And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man that was blind from his birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."—ST. JOHN ix. 1–3.

THE disciples, who put this question about the blind man, were in the position of men who were struggling to harmonize all their inherited traditions, all their previous conclusions, with the new light that was gradually dawning on them. They had been brought up to believe that every instance of suffering was due to the sin of the sufferer, or, at least, to that of his parents. This was the common and popular inference from the truth which was revealed and insisted on in the Old Testament—that all sin brought punishment in its train, national sin as well as individual sin. Often the connection between sin and disease or misfortune they felt to be obvious enough. Why should they not, then, pass on to establish it where it was less obvious? Why should not they go a step further

Digitized by Google

and assume that, as all sin produced punishment, so all suffering must be punishment—a token of previous sin, a direct consequence, a judgment, as we say? And so they went on to treat all suffering as though it were well deserved, and on this ground they felt themselves justified in holding aloof from the afflicted. It was, it is, it always must be, an easy way out of the difficulty. To lay down that no one suffers except by his own fault or the fault of his parents is to get rid of many perplexing questions, and the disciples had been brought up to believe it; it had taken hold of them, and you know how hard it is to shake one's self free from inherited traditions; you know, also, how inclined even now certain people are to argue in the same fashion, how slowly this belief dies out. But it had been coming home to the disciples gradually that this was not Christ's way of looking at suffering; that he looked at it as something that should attract instead of repel, that He did not treat it as though it were only a punishment. Our Master had encountered this temper before in reference to those on whom the tower in Siloam fell, and had distinctly laid down that the way to look upon such things was not in reference to the past lives of others, but in reference to the lives of the onlookers: "Except ye" (who hear of these visitations) "repent, ye shall all likewise perish." You can get, He said, a meaning

Digitized by Google

and a warning from these things, it is true, but it is a meaning and a warning for yourselves about the sins of which you know you are guilty. Thus He had encountered this temper, and, further, He had shown, by His whole treatment of suffering, by the way He had first attracted and then relieved sufferers of every kind, that He had no notion of a black mark of previous sin being stamped on every case of sickness; that He came near suffering, "not to judge, but to deliver;" that the very signs of His coming were the unclean spirit cast out, the deaf hearing, the dumb speaking, the palsied man being relieved of the heavier burden even than his sickness—"Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." It was very startling to them at first;* they thought that God was only the Punisher of all sin, and they found that the Son of God was the Deliverer from it. They thought that sickness and suffering were the effects of sin—*i.e.* traceable effects here and now—and He showed them that no such connection could be established. They thought that they must treat sickness as the sentence of God's wrath; He would treat it as the bondage of Satan, which He was to unloose. They thought that they should keep away from men who were afflicted; He taught by His own example that it was those very afflictions and the depth of their

* F. D. Maurice's Sermon on the Text.

Digitized by Google

causes which drew Him into the closest fellowship with the sufferers, which exercised on Him a claim which He felt to be irresistible.

Puzzled by this apparent contradiction between His practice "Who, they knew, hated sin far more than they did," and their own religious traditions, these disciples resolve to bring the question to an issue, and point to this well-known case, this man who was constantly seen begging in the streets of Jerusalem, and ask Him to solve their difficulty. Perhaps he did not sin in this state of existence; perhaps his parents sinned; at any rate, here he is, a man born blind. What does it mean? Is it all wrong, or what is the solution?

Our Lord's answer leads us to the discovery of the higher truth about suffering. "You want to know," He says, "why this man is thus afflicted in this special way. I will tell you, will tell you the ultimate end—for the manifestation of the works of God. It is that the Love of God and the Power of God may be shown in him to you. You thought that he was one to turn away from, to treat as beneath you. I tell you he is sent here to be your benefactor; even in his blindness and darkness he is sent here to give you a new light. Learn to look upon him with reverence as one whom God has sent with a special revelation to yourselves."

Digitized by Google

It is to the depth and profound meaning of this answer of Christ's that I propose to draw your attention this Sunday, when our attention is especially directed to the relief of human suffering. Why do people suffer as they do? Why does the maiming, crippling accident happen? Why, since Christ showed His sympathy with human suffering in a thousand ways, does He not put an end to it? Why are lives, apparently useful in other ways, paralyzed by it? What is the good of it all? These perpetual questions are asked and answered every day. Let us study Christ's answer—"Men suffer that the Love and the Power of God may be revealed in them." He does not deny that suffering is an evil, but only says that out of evil good issues, that it is an opportunity for the manifestation of the works of God, that God's love and power are manifested in suffering.

How can we see this to be true?

I. We see it, in the case of this blind man, in the *improvement of his character*, in the *growth of his faith.* Look at his answers to the Sanhedrim—"One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see;" "Herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence He is, and yet He hath opened mine eyes." Above all, his simple, straight answer to the question, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" "Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on

Digitized by Google

Him?" These answers are witnesses to a faith as simple, as brave, as ideal as anything in the Bible. And the discipline which had brought out these high qualities was undoubtedly the work of God. Suffering had produced its intended effect; it had purified and ennobled character; the loss of an outward eye had led the man to desire more that his inward eye might be opened. He had gained through trial a capacity for a high faith of no common order, and thus "the works of God were manifested in him."

Brethren, we all of us know the purifying power of suffering; we have seen it, if not experienced it; "the works of God are manifested" on many a sick-bed in the highest fashion—the dross is purged away, the old selfishness is transfigured, the higher life, the life of God in man, grows, the Incarnation is shadowed forth again. We indeed minister to sickness and suffering—we in our feebleness and shortsightedness—we try to manifest God to those who lie before us, and yet again and again the teacher goes away the taught, taught about the deepest possibilities that are open to our nature, taught ennobling and transforming lessons of faith and trust and patience, such as we can learn nowhere else. Mere sermonizing, mere talking about goodness, mere framing of glowing sentences, what an emptiness it seems when we come back from some sick-beds, from the great living



Digitized by Google

spectacle of purified aims, and of a transforming faith —a faith that is "being made perfect through suffering"! Again and again our pity is turned to almost envy, and our feeble efforts at consolation into an attitude of almost adoration, and we have but one wish, "If only we could be as they are!" Yes, the works of God are manifested still in the patient high faith of suffering men and women; character grows in the sunshine that is reflected from Calvary; the old mystic truth gets a new light. While the grain lives, it is nothing but a seed; if it die, and only if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

Oh! when the Cross comes to us, the time to lie by and suffer, the time for inaction, which need not be sloth, or when it comes in some bitter disappointment, some overwhelming calamity, some shattering of trust in one on whom we thought we could lean, some desolating disillusion—when the Cross comes, may we only have the grace and the faith and the strength to know that *then* is the opportunity, that there are no words so moving, no admonitions, no warnings so powerful as the words that come from a broken, weary, crucified life, that speaks only by its high faith and its purified aims—that does not need to speak, indeed, at all, for "the works of God are manifested in it." This is the one comfort and unfailing consolation for the sorrowful, the mourners, the

Digitized by Google

afflicted. What may come out of their lives, what they may be to others, they never know. The bruised leaves send forth the sweetest scent. Those who seem to be useless, cast down and crushed by sickness, if only they have the faith to grasp the loving hand of Christ, if only they have the determination, what may they not be? Streams that purify the surrounding deserts of life; mirrors that show forth the highest life—the life of the Man of Sorrows—unconscious teachers who never need to speak, for "the works of God are manifested in them."

II. Again, the works of God are manifested in the sick and suffering, not only in their own growth of character, but in the response they evoke from others. It is not every one who is alive to the lessons to be learnt from the sorrow and suffering of others; but even the men who live for pleasure, and the women who live for vanity and compliments, and who seem to be insensible to anything else, are moved sometimes by the claims of suffering. Some accident brings them face to face with suffering, and the works of God are before them as they have never been before.

It is here that institutions like London hospitals manifest the works of God; they bring out and evoke from very superficial lives their best feelings; they give them at least a passing interest, which lifts their lives, if only even for a time, out of their normally

Digitized by Google

low levels. That cry of pain, that restless all-night weariness, that dim look that tells of a lingering death—they are the present utterances of Christ, the appeal from the brethren who are one with Him; they come with even greater force than His cries from Calvary, because it is *here* and *now* Christ suffers in these. This is the great work of all disorder in God's world—it is to reproduce in men and women the Spirit of Him Who "bare our infirmities;" it is to kindle in us the same tenderness and sympathy which He came from heaven to show. Evil is thus God's opportunity, the occasion of good; the evil of bodily disorder calls out the best feelings within men. Every one in a house capable of any goodness becomes better when some member of the house is sick. So every hospital, every means of relieving suffering, all the dark shadows that tell of our present state, are a manifestation of the works of God. They tell us perpetually that God chastens, not because He hates, but because He loves, and that the very means, which He uses to chasten, draw out from others the highest good within them, the tenderest ministries, the most self-forgetful pains and trouble, the very spirit of Him Who was amongst us as "One that serveth." Let us, then, claim our privilege of ministering to the suffering. Hospitals in the truest sense are Christ's temples, where directly or indirectly, as to-day, we

Digitized by Google

minister to Him. They are not supported as they ought to be. Take the nearest to us, St. George's, which is used to a large extent by the rich people of this neighbourhood for their servants. How many, or rather how few, of their names appear in the subscription list! It will be a real scandal and reproach if it should come to pass that our London hospitals have to be supported by the rates, a real reflection on the reality of our Christianity; but it will only be avoided, not only now but always, by the cultivation of the true feeling that the higher works, the works of God, are perpetually manifested in them, by a deepened appreciation of the claims of suffering. It is on these high grounds that I base my appeal. Are these hospitals to continue manifestations of the works of God, temples of compassion, evidences of Christian feeling, witnesses to the fellowship wrought by suffering; or are they to become bitter evidences of the decay of national Christianity, mere secularized institutions? Look at the money spent this week on the mere seeing of a spectacle *—no doubt on a grand and unique occasion, but can we help thinking that its real grandeur will be impaired if, as is suggested may be the case, the cause of the sick and dying suffer from it? We cannot give for others, but let us at least for ourselves give what we can to a cause

* Preached on the Sunday before the Jubilee.

Digitized by Google

which is more closely identified than any other with Him Whom we own as our Lord and Master, in order that hospitals may continue to be places where in the highest and truest way "the works of God are manifested among us."

Digitized by Google

## *THE ENDURING MEAT.*

"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you."—ST. JOHN vi. 27.

IS it a real prohibition, this "labour not"—a discouragement of honest hard work for daily food? Is, then, the material life of man of no account? Is it better to be half nourished and poorly clad, and to occupy one's self in dreamy visions about what may or may not come after death has done its work? Surely we know that He does not mean that; that He who felt the binding necessity of work, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day," never could have meant us to twist His words into an excuse for mere slackness about our daily work—could never have even hinted to us that absorption in the hereafter would be an excuse for shirking duty now. There can be no deeper or more mischievous perversion of Christ's words than to see in them anything that even remotely suggests that. He had just

Digitized by Google

shown His sympathy on a large scale with man's material wants. He had recognized the fact that man must eat to live, only He had done much more. This speaking sign He had showed them was so much more than a mere means of providing bodily food; it was a parable—a pledge of something much higher and deeper, of something which was to endure long after the remembrance of the meal had perished. And yet here they were seeking Him out in the hope only of getting more to eat, or with a kind of stupid expectation of seeing something wonderful. He is in despair about them—about their want of insight. "Ye seek Me," he says, "because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled," or, as it is literally, "were satisfied like animals with fodder." * And so it is that you missed the real point and meaning of the whole matter. It was to feed the hungry, but not merely to feed the hungry, that the wonder was wrought. The loaves and the fishes, as they grew and multiplied, were a sign, a token, a pledge of deeper things, even of that which endures, of that which is ever here and ever unexhausted—that Divine nourishment, which alone can satisfy the uttermost longings of men. And so He goes on, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth." Now we understand

* Cf. Westcott's Commentary, *in loc.*

Digitized by Google

Him. It is not a prohibition, a mere negative, like we use when we say to a child, "Don't do that," but that use of the negative which is meant to suggest a comparison, and which serves to bring out the intense, the overmastering importance of the alternative course suggested. It is not a discouragement to work; it is perfectly consistent with the advice, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." But it gives a distinct and deep object in work; it goes down into the centre and heart of things. It says, "Don't stop in the material, the mere surface of things; work, and win by work not only 'the meat which perisheth,' but 'the meat which endureth'—that food that suffers no change, that remains in man, as a principle of power issuing in eternal life. There is more, even in the work for meat with a view to subsistence, than meets the eye. The work has meanings, issues, results that remain when its immediate effect has passed away; on those issues let your mind, your attention, your heart be fixed." This, then, is what we get out of Christ's words—no command to be slack in our work for temporal needs, only in all our work to look beyond the immediate result for *that which endures;* not to limit our horizon to what is on the surface of things, not to work merely that we may be filled like animals, and that we may carry away no impression but one

Digitized by Google

of satisfaction, but to labour to get at the heart and the meaning even of common things.

All natural desires are but symbols of our higher nature; the eating, the drinking, the longing to share another's life, the sleep and the waking, the longing for rest, and the keen desire for physical exertion—all are signs, shadows, symbols. Nothing helps us so much as to consider this, to dwell on the deeper side of things. Everything we can give our labour to has in it something deeper, something hid; something we must have eyes to see; something we must try more and more to visualize. Out of all our common work comes something more than the meat that perisheth; there is what endures, what lasts, what remains when time is no more. While you labour, says Christ, let that be what you keep before you. Once really get this point of view—that in everything you do now, your concern, your interest, must be not with the fleeting and temporary result, but with the permanent, the underlying, the real, and you get into a new region, everything is transformed; "old things pass away, all things become new." Let us look a little closely at two or three of the results of this change of mental attitude.

I. *Nothing is henceforth common or unclean to you*, nothing is beneath your doing; everything you do has in it something deeper than the mere seeming, the

Digitized by Google

temporary result, "the meat that perisheth." Your play as well as your work, your relaxations as well as your studies; all come in, nothing need be left out, nothing belongs merely, wholly, and entirely to the present. That which belongs only to the present perishes, but it is the husk, the empty shell, the form of the thing done. That which remains, which is, over which time has no power, is the kernel, the reality, the substance (to use the old formula of philosophy). You often hear, and sometimes in sermons, a most misleading and mischievous division made between time and eternity, as if the one were now and the other hereafter; as if time lasts a certain number of years, and then eternity begins. *Eternity is now.* Time is a mere surface condition; to get into the eternal region here and now means only to get into reality, to be intense, to go below the surface. Directly you do that, you touch that which changes not. When you really pray, you touch the eternal, though the words you say belong to time and pass away. Therefore nothing need be wholly temporal, belong merely to time, nothing need be cast away altogether like old clothes. There is that which belongs to the reality of things in all you do, if you reach it. In this way you get a new interest, a new vigour, a new life to pour into your work. Your work is, for the most part, with many of you a dull

Digitized by Google

routine. Let me say, in passing, all useful lives have much routine, for nine things out of ten that have to be done even by those called to the highest work are matters of mere routine, things any one could do. But perhaps yours is a resultless sort of routine, a treadmill sort of work, a mere task—copying or making out bills, or signing papers, or writing letters, or doing accounts, or manual labour—and it is hard to be told that you are the son of God, heir of all things, partaker of the Divine Nature, and to turn to this beggarly routine. Ah! just because you are so great, just because your life is linked to the Godhead through the Incarnate Son, because you bear the Body of Christ wherever you go, therefore all things you touch become transfigured. In themselves they remain, like the Sacramental elements, what they were—a dry routine, a bundle of duties—but the consecrating touch passes over them, and they are linked to what is beyond time and sense, to the eternal; they become "that which endureth," and then they give you back something, like the consecrated elements in the Holy Sacrament. Something passes out of them back into yourself, something which does not perish, something which endures, something which enriches your character—some self-control, some energy, some brave grappling with difficulties; something comes back to your real life

Digitized by Google

out of each daily duty, each elementary bit of routine, and when all else has passed, that remains, will remain, must remain. How can, then, anything be common or unclean to you when you who touch it carry Christ's Nature with you? How can anything you have to do be beneath you, when out of the grind, the toil, the labour, out of the repulsive subject-matter, there comes the strengthened will, the purified aim, ay, the intensity that reaches reality, and that grows into a high enthusiasm? Henceforth, then, call nothing, no labour, no toil, no dreary routine, no honest recreation that fits you for work, common or unclean. Wherever you go, whatever you do, you carry the transmuting power, the Nature of Christ, and if only you will remember that and all it involves, the wilderness will "blossom as the rose." Your "labour will no more be for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endures unto everlasting life."

II. And more than this, this vision of the reality that remains beneath the temporary will give you a deeper view about failure and success. As long as you labour merely for the "meat which perisheth," for the pleasure or gain or praise you can get out of your work, you will probably ache and groan again and again with disappointment; you will shirk your duty and scamp your work out of mere weariness.

Digitized by Google

The limitations that beset our best efforts will oppress and harass and vex and try you almost beyond endurance. You cannot see the meaning or the issues of your surroundings, contrary things that happen will seem to be bad luck, or whatever else you choose to call them, and perhaps you will look out with envy on those with whom, as you think, everything succeeds and all goes well. Ah, how little we really know the price men pay often for apparent success! Not merely the price of a troubled conscience, of a weary sense of secret wrong, but the price of a consuming anxiety, the price of an absorption in things they loathe, the price of an attempt to keep up appearances, which is, after all, often one of the heaviest calls on his heart-strings that a man ever has to meet. None of us, too, while we are doing our work, can be a judge of failure or success. Of course we try to judge, and sometimes when we get a vision, even a passing vision, we do see how wrong we are in our estimates and in our judgments of present success and present failure; above all, we see this when we look back and see in the pages of history what has endured and what has passed away. Then we begin to understand. Very slowly, like a great machine, the real judgment of mankind moves, very, very slowly it evolves, grinds out of the deposit of apparently

Digitized by Google

splendid success and dismal failure, the solid result, "that which endures." Very trivial, very commonplace accessories are then seen to have surrounded the greatest things; and out of the greatest positions, the widest opportunities, how ugly often the secret results which history brings out. "Mean and miserable, forlorn and helpless, appeared to many at Rome the life of the imprisoned Apostle chained to a soldier," amid the discomfort, the disrepute of a prison life, a man to be pointed at; and yet this was the man who was "to outdo their own heroes in the homage of all coming days," * and to seem, even to the sceptic and the doubter of our time, one of the marvels of the world. "He laboured not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endures." Full of disappointment, too, have been men who have loved justice, and struggled for their brethren for just laws, for freedom, for wider knowledge; how many have been in their day objects of unpopularity and suspicion, subjects for the provocation of petty adversaries and the sneers of unworthy friends! Yet they laboured early and late, and that not for the "meat which perisheth," therefore it is that their lives have left behind an enduring result.

Apparent failure or success are nothing, less than

* Dean Church.

Digitized by Google

nothing, to those who seek "that which endures." The question they ask about a cause is not, Is it flourishing? do clever men think well of it? do its advocates always conduct themselves with becoming propriety? but, Is it just? does it belong to eternal righteousness? is it what men have a right to struggle for? is it worth struggling for? And if the answer is yes, they fling themselves into it. The man who waits on success, either in movements or his own work, who will not work unless he can see the dawning day, who waits to see which way the wind blows, or which is the popular cause, he knows not the Master's secret, the secret of Him Who chose the scaffold and saw the victory beyond it; his labour is only for the "meat which perisheth." But he who labours for "that which endureth" cannot let his vision be bounded by present failure or success. In the days, the dark, dreary days of our depression, when we can scarcely stir ourselves to do anything, when disappointment has eaten into our very heart, then is the time to remember that man's weakness is God's opportunity, and that he who trusts in God and looks below the surface of things, cannot measure results by present appearances.

III. And lastly, Christ's command gives the law and rule of our methods of work. The man who labours for "meat which perisheth" cannot use the

Digitized by Google

tools or work in the spirit of him who labours for the "meat which endureth;" he will, he must, choose not any method, but the highest.

Let us take the instance which our own circumstances suggest to illustrate this last point, viz. education. We are building new Schools in our Parish to take the place of those which must come down to make room for the new Church. Why should we do this? Why should we not leave to the School Board the duty of providing new buildings? Why should we care and make sacrifices to build Schools connected with the Church? Is it only a desire, as has been suggested, to perpetuate a system of ecclesiastical dogmatism, or even to keep things in our own hands? Surely it is for a better reason. It is because our view of education is in accordance with Christ's principle; because we must insist on "that which endures." I have not one word to say against Board schools, for I have a high sense of their limited value; they are a necessity, and, more than that, are all they can be. "Splendid machines," as a Government inspector said to me the other day, in which a scramble for fragments of knowledge is most energetically and industriously kept up with unremitting energy, with unwearied precision; but a scramble for fragments of knowledge which has even resulted in passing the seventh standard does not



Digitized by Google

fulfil our idea of education. Education, from the point of view of those who believe in an enduring result, is the presentation to children of life-shaping motives. It is more than giving fragments of knowledge; it is the training of the will and the conscience as well as of the heart; it is moulding character, and character can only be moulded where you can get living influence, life-power, a definite interest. Not by what you teach so much as by the way you teach, you mould character. Any scheme of popular instruction must, as things are, guard these things most jealously. It cannot give time or opportunity to teachers to follow up and take a personal interest in children; it must teach religious truth, with its great determining, life shaping motives, in too indefinite a fashion; it must avoid enthusiasm and definiteness, or it is accused of proselytizing and narrowness. For this reason, much as I appreciate the excellence of the work of the Board schools in their strictly limited sphere, they do not, and cannot, satisfy the methods suggested by the text. They must be in the main "splendid machines," but only rarely and accidentally real life-powers. Nor can I say that these results are always attained in Church schools, but where a school is definitely part of a parochial organization, where Christ's religion is taught as a reality, when other things are thought

Digitized by Google

of as important besides the results of the annual inspection, when there is the consideration for each child that is only possible in a limited area, *the tendency is in this direction.* There is an atmosphere of home, of personal interest, about the voluntary schools which there is not elsewhere. If education means making the most of a child, moulding its character as well as training its mind, the possibilities of a Church school are far above those of any school conducted by a Board, which cannot have a heart, even if it can afford itself the luxury of a conscience.

Let me say again, I know Board schools are a necessity, and that it is the part of wise men to make the best of them. The teachers have often a real desire to do all they can for their children; they often do effect very much, but the system, however much one and another may strive, is against them; the red-tape traditions are against them. Things you or I could do and would do, kind things, helpful things—cannot be done, are not done, by a Board. "We never do it," is the stereotyped answer, when such things are suggested as desirable.

No doubt there is much that no system of education can do, however good, and there are grievous blots in our national system which all Government-aided schools suffer under. In the words of a great

Digitized by Google

teacher,* we have educated on the lines of "idolatry of brain-force and glorification of memory stores," and we have made poor work of it. "The human being has been left out, and the human being must be brought in." It is because we believe that it is more possible to bring in "the human being" in the true sense, to show interest in children, to help them with that religious influence which it is the highest mission of the Church to exercise, that we wish to interest you in this work. There is nothing, we know, dearer to our Master's heart than the welfare of little children, and no better object that we can devote our thank-offerings to than by providing that here they may continue to be taught and trained under those higher influences whose aim it is to cultivate not merely the temporary, but the eternal in the present; to teach them to "labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life."

* Rev. E. Thring, who since these words were spoken has entered into his rest.

Digitized by Google

# *THE INVASION OF EVIL, AND ITS RESULTS.*

"O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end."—Ps. ix. 6.

WE have been reading the account of the fall of man, of the coming of evil into the life of man, and in whatever way we take the account, whether as an allegory or as a literal occurrence, we cannot help being struck by the way in which the proceedings of each actor in the drama tally with our own experience of human nature. All the weaknesses of human nature, all the characteristic ways of men and women in their weaker and worse moments, are represented there. There is human nature on its weaker side throughout, from the success of the artful appeal to woman's curiosity to the ungenerous defence put forward by Adam in the implied reproach of the words, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Call it an allegory if you like, it bears the stamp of

Digitized by Google

probability upon it, and at any rate it gives us broadly an answer to the ever-recurrent question, How came there to be evil in the works of a good God? It tells us that evil came from outside, though it tells us nothing more. Let us be quite honest and say that we may have guesses, but have no further knowledge about the origin of evil. We know that it came into the world, but not whence it came; we only know that *God did not make it.* To believe in God as the Good is to exclude the possibility of believing in Him as the Creator of evil, and the theory of deterioration does not meet the difficulty of His foreknowledge. We are left face to face with the fact of a Revelation that gives us a partial answer on this question—that tells us that evil came from outside, and will be ultimately overthrown and cast out, but suggests further questions to which it gives no hope of any immediate answer.

I. There are, however, certain broad things about this invasion of evil and its ultimate overthrow which will make things clearer if we dwell on them. It is a comfort to have it clearly established that evil is an invader here, for evil has made itself so wonderfully at home that, at times, it is difficult to believe that it was not the original inhabitant, and good the invader from some other planet. It is something to know that there was a time before evil made itself

Digitized by Google

at home here; it points to a hope that the time may yet come so magnificently foretold in the text, "O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end," when no remembrance even of evil shall darken the works of a good God. If we can accept the Revelation of God so far as to believe in the introduction of evil from outside, it is a great comfort; it modifies all our views about it; we are delivered from that horrid shadow of necessitarianism which clouds the lives of so many. God's voice assures us that evil was not His work; that it came, too, from no flaw in the material of which He made use; that the elements which He used imposed no indispensable necessity upon Him in a bad direction, but that all in its issue was "very good" until a foreign element was introduced into this world—introduced, too, by a being not belonging to this world, a being who can therefore be removed by a higher Power. It is God that tells us, as we look on the world around and mark the triumphs of evil, "An enemy hath done this." How came there then to be an enemy? There are hints in the Bible about the fall of Satan. Christ says, "he abode not in the truth." St. Jude speaks of angels "who kept not their first estate." St. Paul speaks of "pride as the condemnation of the devil;" but it is difficult for us to conceive how temptation could act on spirits or whence it came. What is one to say of

Digitized by Google

this mysterious resistance to God in these far-off ages? Why is it allowed? What are its limits? What is its ultimate issue? These are a few out of many questions that might be raised, and which cannot here and now be satisfactorily answered.

For the man who cannot be contented with the position "that we know in part" now, but who must have an explanation in full here and now of the whole difficulty, who says that he will not believe in the goodness and love of God unless he gets it, there is no answer. It is useless ignoring or blinking at the fact; about evil we have not the whole answer, and we must wait for it. It may be a foil which brings out greater good than would otherwise be possible; it may be a horrible dream which fascinates men now, but which, when they awake and see it as it really is they will loathe and detest; but here it is, and as far as our present limited powers go, we seem only to be able to see clearly how much we lose by its invasion, how much the misery of the world is augmented by it. We cannot answer, we can only face the questions which it suggests. Why is evil so strong? Why does it seem to grow so quickly and good so painfully? Why does the good we set ourselves to do seem to fail, and the evil we so easily drop into seem to grow by leaps and bounds? Why do death and trouble come so harshly as they do?

Digitized by Google

These are questions that have troubled and do trouble, not irreligious, but religious people, and there seems to be no answer except the dim and mysterious one that comes from the Cross of Christ, and from the recollection that had there been no evil there would never have dawned on the world the full beauty, the exceedingness of Divine Love. There we do get a light, but it is a light that helps us not so much to answer these questions as to believe that there is an answer, and that some day that answer will be given.

And then further back lie all the importunate questions that can be raised about the origin of evil. Is it not better, wiser, and truer to say, "We do not know"? Sometimes you may have stopped to listen to some earnest but shallow street-preacher, and heard some wily sceptic propound to him some questions which the poor man tries to answer, because he does not like to avow that he cannot answer them. This is the kind of dialogue that often ensues. "You say," says the sceptic, "that God is good?" "Yes." "And Almighty?" "Yes." "Why, then, if He is good, and if He is Almighty, did He create the devil to tempt men?" "Well, the devil was good at the beginning, and fell away." "Did God know he would become wicked, and did He create him knowing the harm he would do?" The answer comes irresolutely, "Yes." "Well, then, how can God be good and yet

Digitized by Google

bring all this evil on the world?" and so forth. And so he wins an easy triumph; the "simple folk go away ashamed," and wonder whether this underlying conviction of theirs that somehow God is good is only a delusion. How much of the confusion and heart-searching that surrounds us comes from the inability and unwillingness of men to own their own limitations—to say either "We don't know," or at least to say, "We can tell you certain things, but there are other questions we can't answer; we know in part;" we know enough to walk by, but not enough to answer every question and explain every apparent difficulty. If there were only courage to say that there would be less scepticism; but it takes some humility, it takes some courage in an age when the world is being flooded with scientific knowledge, to say we don't know, we must wait to know. It is a humble position to take, but it is a true one. We may build up speculations, we may lay down conclusions, we may complete out of our heads what Revelation has not told us. Is it not wiser to bring home to ourselves in face of these great problems, the extent of our real ignorance? Is it not better to own candidly that, deeply interesting as such questions are, we have not the means at present of answering them?

No doubt this is a humbling confession to make,

Digitized by Google

but it is an honest one. No doubt it seems to involve a retreat from positions which great teachers and great schools of theology in the past took up; it seems to be a drawing back, and the question comes, How far are we to go in saying we don't know? May we not be pressed back into almost utter agnosticism?

Such a consideration may be impressive to some, but it can have no weight with those who believe in a Revelation that is full enough to walk by, but in other respects is partial. However tempting a wider range of speculation may be, a range that admits of peremptory inferences, it is surely better, truer, nobler, and wiser to say, Christ has fixed the sources and bounds of our present knowledge, and He has not told us this. Is it right, is it reasonable, to try to force our way through the veil that He has drawn down? Need we be ashamed of confessing on such a question as this to a true, wholesome, and reverent attitude of ignorance—an ignorance which, after all, is not without its parallel in regard to some other facts of life?

II. That is one remark about the question raised by the Fall; there is another I am very anxious to press upon you, a side of things about the results of evil which is often strangely misconceived of. How Satan came to be what he is, how evil began, we cannot tell. But we can tell the works of Satan, the

Digitized by Google

result of the working of evil, and we can avoid the awful blasphemy by which an apparently pious method of speech often attributes the actual workings of evil to the good God. That within a limited sphere Satan can tempt, but not force; that he can produce certain kinds of physical evils as the result of his success is clear; that he can even touch life in certain instances, seems to me to be clear from the Book of Job. The New Testament view of the working of Satan appears to me to be very unlike the view which is often authoritatively set before us by Christian teachers. According to Christ's teaching, Satan causes sickness and insanity, Satan is the author of temptation, the destroyer of good seed, the sower of tares, the evil one, the adversary from whom we must pray to be delivered. That is Christ's teaching. Many Christian teachers shrink from it, from the apparent dualism it seems to involve; they attribute all misfortune, death, sickness, and insanity to God. It is "the will of God," is their normal expression when they hear of any misfortune, and the result is that they have almost destroyed in their disciples the idea of the Good God. It would be much truer and more like the New Testament, if they said it is "the power of Satan." I know it is very difficult sometimes to draw the line. So much good seems to grow out of evil, pain is so often

Digitized by Google

a preservative, that is often called sin which is really misplaced energy; it is very difficult to draw the line between good and evil; moreover, it is very uncomfortable to some minds to conceive of two contrary forces as being at work. But however difficult it may be to decide between good and evil in the abstract, surely there is in each of us for ourselves the resort of conscience. Conscience does judge for us every day, and whatever conscience allows, we must call good and attribute to God, and whatever conscience calls evil, we must call evil, and attribute to Satan. Where good comes out of evil, we shall see God triumphing over Satan now; and conversely, when evil triumphs, we shall say, "This does not come from God, and it is only for a time—in the end God will triumph;" in the end we shall say, "O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end." So then, accepting the real meaning of the story of the Fall, that Satan brought sin into the world, and not God, I find my conscience bearing me out that God's work has not been to bring in evil, but to erect on the basis of evil, and the death which it involves, the hope and faith of a higher life, and out of sin and repentance and forgiveness He has evolved a higher righteousness than could have been if sin had never existed. Satan has been meaning one thing, God has been working out another. Satan has been

Digitized by Google

wasting and destroying, while God has been utilizing antagonistic forces for the purpose of development and progress. And this leads me to say that if I am to believe in God, and to trust His overruling power, I must believe in the existence of Satan. I cannot believe in God if He works evil, but I can believe in God who takes the harm an evil one has done, and out of it works a higher good than is otherwise possible. I know there is a disposition in these days to stumble at the existence of Satan; it is supposed to be old-fashioned to insist on it. I have seen some sermons on Christ's Temptation which laboriously endeavoured to prove that the words of temptation came from the Scribes and Pharisees, and so to get rid of the supposed difficulty of a real Satan. I confess that these elegant new fashions give me neither delight nor comfort. Unless there is an adversary, a Satan, a personality outside man working for evil, I cannot understand the world a bit. If Satan is not a real adversary with a certain limited power to tempt and to inflict evil upon God's children, the Bible has led us astray. If the Son of God became Man to "destroy the works of the devil," we can understand Him. There is no insincerity, then, in the parable of the Sower and the Tares, in the avowal that it was "an enemy who hath done this," *i.e.* who sowed tares, and took away

Digitized by Google

the good seed. There is no unreality, then, in Christ's temptation. He was fighting a real battle against a real adversary. There was an enemy in Gethsemane, who was trying to make Him despair of mankind, and we know not what more beyond—forcing Him to the extremity of conflict, so that His soul was "exceeding sorrowful even unto death," and afterwards wringing from Him words that tell of the utmost depths of woe, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" But if there was no enemy, where is the reality? What is the Cross more than the record of physical sufferings such as have been endured by a thousand others? The whole story of Christ's life and death loses its sincerity if there were no hidden foe to be grappled with.

From another point of view, the reality of Satan's existence seems to be a necessity too. For just think, if you really believe in the existence of Satan, who works evil, from how much unreality you now escape. You are free from what you feel, from what you must have felt to be, the sickening task of saying to some mourning mother, "It is God's will your child should die." You will dare to say, "'An enemy hath done this;' but 'it is well with the child'—the enemy cannot touch the real life." All those who have known deep trouble will understand the comfort it really is not to be told about trouble, "This is God's Will,"

Digitized by Google

not to have the devil's work ascribed to Providence, but to be told, "God your Father did not mean, and does not wish, you to be so troubled; 'an enemy hath done this.'"

Again, you need not any more suppose that you are to put up with misery and disease and poverty as if they came from God. Very often these things are the outcome of your own fault, as when drunkenness or idleness bring poverty and disease; but none the less are they evils of Satan's working, though God may use them for your good. Satan causes, or at any rate aggravates, these evils to destroy men, and God again and again uses the suffering they bring to lead men right.

Again, death came from sin, and so from Satan. He uses death to mislead and tempt us. He would have us believe that our souls perish with our bodies, that the grave parts friends for ever, and that we go into everlasting nothingness. God uses death to make men thoughtful, steadfast, courageous, and trustful. To say that death is God's Will, *i.e.* the result of forces set in work by the right-loving Will of the Father, is often palpably untrue. Here is a case of a poor woman dying of typhoid fever, brought on by defective drainage, which her landlord is too covetous to put in order. Am I to tell her sorrowing children that this is the result of forces set in work by

Digitized by Google

the All-Father? Is it not truer to say, "An enemy hath done this;" an enemy who tempts men to be covetous set the train in motion which issued in this death. "It is not the will of your Father that any one of these little ones shall perish." So with death from accidents. It is not God who makes the engine-driver disregard his signals with such hideous results; it is not God who inspires men to drive recklessly in the streets. How do we dare to say that such deaths are the Will of God? Why should we obscure our idea of the good God by attributing such cruel results to Him? So with suffering (not self-caused), surely our message ought to be, "God does not plan that these woes should come on you. Satan causes these evils, but God uses them to lead men to something higher. The Will of God is not your misfortune, but your sanctification through misfortune."

It would be everything if we could make people more real about this; if, instead of attributing evil to God, they would attribute evil to Satan, and to God the Will and the Power to overcome evil and to bring good out of evil. They would pray more earnestly and more intelligently, they would watch tendencies more carefully, they would speak about death and poverty and misery more sincerely, if they recognized them as the evil works of Satan which Christ came to destroy; they would prove more real comforters if,



Digitized by Google

instead of attempting to console people for evils by imputing them to God, they began to lay them on the author of evil. There is often an unconscious appeal from the Providence that all ills are put down to the good God.* Did you ever hear the Norfolk farmer's reply to his clergyman when he would have comforted him for the loss of his wife by saying, in the insincere language of conventional consolation, that she had been taken from him by Providence? "Yes," was the reply; "that there Providence seems to be always down on a poor fellow. Last year when the crops failed, you told me it was Providence, and the year before he was sending me the rheumatics, and now he's down on me again and has taken off my poor old woman; but, thank God, there's One above who'll be down on him some time!" Surely they are golden words if they warn us against the insincerity which often allows us to speak of God as though He was the author of evil. Satan plagues men still as he plagued Job; but God's power is displayed in bringing good out of evil. Those, then, who would faithfully follow Christ, those who would not misrepresent God while they see in evil an invasion, and while they look for its final overthrow, will regard physical evil, death, disease, misery, poverty, and squalor, not as a

* Quoted from an article in the *Christian Apologist*, to which I owe some of the thoughts in this sermon.

Digitized by Google

law of fate, still less as the Will of God, but as the results of Satan's rule, which it is God's Will to overrule now and to extirpate hereafter.

And if once we really see this, it will be impossible for us any longer to stand idle. We shall join in Christ's crusade against all physical and moral evil, against evil influences everywhere, against defective drainage as well as against dishonesty and trickery, and by doing so shall do something to bring about that blessed consummation, when all the destructions of the enemy, sickness and poverty, and war and death, as well as vice and crime, shall come to a perpetual end, when even the very memory of them shall have passed away, and "God shall be all in all."

Digitized by Google

## *CHRIST THE REVEALER OF THE FATHER.*

"O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have declared unto them Thy Name."—ST. JOHN xvii. 25, 26.

WE are thinking to-day of Christ's Ascension into heaven, waiting with the apostles for the promised gift of the Holy Ghost. It is a Sunday by itself—one of those halting-places on which we may look back on what has been, or look forward to what will be. This morning let us go back and look at a side of Christ's life often overlooked, or at least unduly subordinated to others, but which is gradually coming into the prominence that properly belongs to it.

Christ, then, came from the Father as One with the Father, to reveal the Father as only He Who was One with the Father could reveal Him. No man had before seen God. Moses had seen what man could see and live; but no eyes of sense could see the Glory, the transcendent Perfection, and live.

Digitized by Google

The impossibility lay in man himself; he had not "eyes to see," to use a New Testament expression. "No man" had "seen God . . . the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." He Who was "the express image of His Person" put Himself under human limitations that we men might be able to see and, in a limited measure, to understand God. And so, as He sums up in that great seventeenth chapter His life-work, He does it in these words: "I have declared unto them Thy Name," *i.e.* as name is used in the Bible, "Thine inmost Nature and Character." This needs consideration, lest we miss the peculiar significance of the Bible expression, "the Name of God," as we easily may in days when names are mere labels and signify nothing. In those days names were given and changed to represent realities of character or of office, and therefore the expression, "I have declared unto them Thy Name," was a luminous one. God's Name expresses God's inmost and essential character, *i.e.* goodness. To know God's Name is to know Himself. To hallow His Name is to keep holy one's conception of Himself, to protect it, as far as one can, from unworthy and degrading mixtures. And to have made known the inmost Nature, the real Character of God, His consequent attitude towards men, was one great part of our Lord's work. "He came to save men," we

Digitized by Google

say, and say rightly, but don't let us narrow the expression. He came to deliver them, among other things, from a degrading conception of God, from sins of the intellect as well as of the heart and will, and the way He saves men from this sin is by revealing the Father. Again, He came to save men, *i.e.* to make them whole and sound, to bring health into their spiritual nature, and for that purpose He not only healed their sores, but gave them an ideal to work up to, and that ideal was the vision of the Father revealed perfectly in Himself.

It needs to insist on this as plainly as possible. It is easy to enumerate the social blessings of Christianity—the elements that go to make up individual happiness which we can trace to its influence; it is easy and often useful, but one wants to look closer. What has been the great liberating teaching, the elevating element in Christianity, that has freed the intellect, instructed the conscience, and raised the affections? It is the unveiling of the Father—the revealing of the inmost nature of God. And perhaps we shall see this more clearly if we go back and look at previous forms of religious belief and their effect in this way.

I. If we look at ancient heathenism we shall see many degrading features, but if we look closer we shall see that its vital defect lay in the conception of

Digitized by Google

the supreme Deity that everywhere appears. What is the character of Jupiter as displayed to us in classical literature? He is a tyrant of the worst kind —a tyrant who uses his power for selfish ends; a tyrant who, if he is happy himself, grudges any share of his happiness to mankind. Or if we turn to the East, Buddhism represents supreme power in a more mystical, but still most unenviable light. The Supreme is a Being who renders independent personal existence intolerable. The only rest for man is absorption into the Nirvana. Side by side with Buddhism you find Hinduism, with its favourite deity, the merciless Siva, and the result is a religion which issues in the horrors of the Juggernaut, and in a system of self-torture utterly revolting.

The greatest cause of degradation throughout is the dark conception of God. It gives to man a feeling that he has a sort of sanction for his sins, just as children who have wicked parents lose their sense of right and wrong: "Father does it," they say: "why shouldn't I?"

And if we turn to the Old Testament, the partial revelation of God made under the law was turned by men into "a ministration of death," as St. Paul calls it for the most part. The history of Judaism, looked at from one side, is the history of the religious deterioration that follows an increasingly distorted concep-

Digitized by Google

tion of the Divine Being. Their conception of God became more and more that of One who is to be feared. The notion of "a consuming fire" haunted the popular imagination. Their prevailing thought of Him was, to see Him is to die. They did what a certain order of minds, which has been trained under extreme Puritan influences, often does even now—they weaved together all the warnings which God addressed to extreme sinners, as showing His one and only attitude to all men; they took texts wholesome and true in themselves, and if applied to the circumstances to which they related, and they made them absolute, so to speak. The side of God's character in relation to wilful evil was the only side they dwelt on; His relation to impotent misery, to true repentance, "showing mercy unto thousands," "being full of compassion," became obscured and blotted out; and so under the influence of fear they gravitated faster and faster. The greater spirits protested again and again against this gravitation, but with little or no effect. The greater spirits declared that God was good; the prophets and Psalmist alike "taught the doctrine of repentance with a clearness and a certainty which were not admitted into the original law." The greater spirits rose to a purer belief, but they failed to draw the masses with them. David and Elijah in an earlier age, Isaiah and

Digitized by Google

Jeremiah later on, struggled against the downward tendency. The people did not know God; they knew Him only as One to be feared, and so they sank down, down, and ever down, under a conviction which turned repentance into remorse and worship into mere fetichism. Manasseh came after Hezekiah, in real fact once and always in figure, and they carried out logically the conception of an inhuman God. The first high place to Moloch was set up by the very king who built the Temple. Tophet was "ordained of old" in the valley of Hinnom—Tophet, where parents ruthlessly sacrificed their own offspring to a presumed religious necessity. So heavy lay the burden of sin, so dark grew the conception of God, that men "gave the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul" in spite of the prophet's warning. The law had given the knowledge of sin. It was meant for life; it was turned to death through the consciousness of sin. And so men went from one fantastic and blood-stained ritual to another to seek ease from remorse and inward care, or they gave way to a desolating and demoralizing atheism, saying, "The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth."

But then, it may be said, the law looked forward; it spake of better things; the prophet's words described in glowing language, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth

Digitized by Google

good tidings!" Brethren, we forget sometimes how misleading it is to translate the past through the present. When we know the meaning of types, when we see the fulfilment of prophecies, we stand in a different region from men who were "in darkness and in the shadow of death," groping after hidden meanings, perpetually haunted by the misgiving that they might be wrong. The higher spirits of that and every age had one unchanging burden, "Who hath believed our report?" Men "waited for light," but "walked in darkness;" "the veil was over the nations"—they did not see God.

And thus when the time came, it seemed so true and so vivid to say, "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

One who had lived under that darkness and felt it, describes in glowing words the change that came over him when he found light in his dwelling, when Christ came to reveal the Father: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." We, at this distance, can scarcely feel the truth of the exulting language of New Testament writers over God's last revelation of Himself. "God, Who, having

Digitized by Google

partially and at various times spoken to the world, hath at last spoken unto the world by His Son," Who being "the express Image of His Person," reveals Himself. The day broke, the burden slipped off, because men saw God in Christ.

II. Christ's Life, then, was a Revelation of what men most wanted to know, of the Character of God. God was in Christ not only "reconciling the world," but making Himself known to men: "He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father." As we gaze on Him going about with that calm, steadfast mien, doing good, healing the sick, sitting with the despised, at home with little children, counting none too sinful for His help, as we see Him in the Gospels, we gaze on the face of God; we catch in Christ the expression of pity and tenderness that is on the Father's face; we see that "He willeth not the death of a sinner," for it is Christ's unchanging purpose to draw sinners to Himself. His sharpest reproof is, "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life;" "The Father Himself loveth you." There is the revelation that is balm to every doubting and troubled soul. And when once this is taken in, that Christ reveals the Father, that this is the God Whom we serve; when all dark and cruel conceptions of an Almighty, evil-working tyrant melt away;—then a new life begins: "old things are passed away; behold, all

Digitized by Google

things are become new." It is as though the sun had come out; the world is tolerable; death is bearable; we can wait through disappointment, for the sun changes all things.

There are hearts—oh, strangest of all mysteries!—that seem dead to any religious impression; but whenever the heart is not sealed up, the conviction, "God loves me," is at once the motive of its penitence and the secret of its joy. That man has no need of the warnings that vex the soul and trouble the conscience of the wilful sinner who will not see. There are such warnings in the New Testament as well as in the Old, and most needful they are for those who need them; "The wages of sin is" still "death." The Gospel guards itself as effectually as the law against the abuse of its revelation; but nothing is allowed to hide or displace the central truth, "God is love;" not power or vengeance, but love. The sun is in the heavens. It is always there, however hidden. When the waves roar and the lightnings shine, when the thunder rolls and the earthquakes rock, God is still love. Whatever cataclysms sin and ingratitude and indifference bring into men's lives, "God is love," and that one revelation made by Christ of the Name of God is the bulwark against the downward tendency that follows partial misconceptions of His Nature. And this is why

Digitized by Google

Christ taught us, in His great prayer, to say first and foremost, "Hallowed be Thy Name." If we want to see how perilously upside down religious systematizers get, let us think of that. What is man's greatest need? Forgiveness, deliverance from evil, says the systematizer. Bread for subsistence, all that makes life smooth, says the humanist. Christ does not say these are not right desires, but He deliberately postpones them. One thing matters above all—He teaches us by the order of the petitions in His prayer that God's Name should be kept Holy; that men should acknowledge God as He is; and so learn to wish that His kingdom may come and His will be done, because they know that His Name is hallowed, *i.e.* that He is a Holy God, and therefore such a One that they can really wish His kingdom to come and His will to be done.

This central truth, this knowledge that "God is love," Christ has exhibited in His life. It is often taught hesitatingly, as liable to abuse; it is sometimes taught with but little appreciation of its real depth, as though love were an easy-going benevolence, and as though God could smile on the self-inflicted cruelty of a man's own self-destruction. But the way it is taught, speculatively and conventionally is, after all, one thing, and the way in which it becomes a practical conviction is another. We

Digitized by Google

need have no fear for those who take it in as a practical conviction, wherever they learn it, in church or chapel, by book or nature, for them antinomianism is impossible. For whom are we more likely to obey? God Whom we know and love, or God before Whom we simply crouch down? Whose is the willing service, a son's or a slave's? But then, it is said that to teach that God is Love makes men presume. I answer, speculatively it may be so; practically, when the conviction becomes a living one, it never can. Alas! to a great extent, Christ's complaint is true now of us: "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee," it has misconceived Thee; its only hope is to know Thee revealed in Christ. Yes, this is the whole Gospel for this and every age, not only that "God was in Christ reconciling the world," which is one side of truth, the one almost perpetually insisted on, and which has got so out of proportion that it leaves God unknown, but also that God was in Christ revealing Himself to mankind; that we only know the Character, the Nature of the Father as set forth in the Son; that all the evils in the Church, all the mistakes, all the wrongs, all the pettiness, all the narrowness, all the miserable squabbles over trifles, have come, as well as the trials about which the Gospel of this our day warns us, because men have not "known the Father."

Digitized by Google

This consideration is a very practical one as regards both individuals and society in these days.

1. For individuals. Many suffer tortures from scruples here and now, and sink down through wretchedness to a lower level because they do not know the Father. The Name is not clear to them. The irrevocable past lies like a burden on them; they are filled with morbid, superstitious fears; they have no hope for themselves, and are of no use to others. "The horrible disease called sin" has left its mark upon them, and there is no recovery from it, or at least nothing but a haunting dread of its return. For them it is best to say that the very fact that God lets them live is a proof how much He loves them; that the only way they can show their repentance and remedy the past, is to place themselves absolutely in God's hands in the present: "Let me live for Thee and work for Thee; but if not, let me die for Thee, O Lord, Thou lover of souls." The torture of memory, the unrest of conscience, only give way slowly, but they do give way, when once the goodness of God, the tender-seeking Love that is mirrored for us in the Life of Christ, is made our very own possession—when it is seen to be no story in a book, no thrice-told tale, but our own possession received through the Blessed Spirit. And though nothing can derange the prin-

Digitized by Google

ciple of that great assize, when every man shall receive the reward of his own works, yet it has happened once—and it happens, I doubt not, again and again—that he who did not begin his work till the eleventh hour, but began it then heartily and gladly, when called to take his wages, found, to his surprise and joy, that he had received as much as those who had "borne the burden and heat of the day."

2. Once more, if we only know the Father in Christ, to what a blank and desolate world are those inviting us back who, sometimes in the region of argument and philosophical treatise, or sometimes through the characters of some ingenious story of our modern everyday life, try to persuade us that we shall rise to something higher if we relegate the Father to the old obscurity, and treat Christ's life as altogether the life of one of ourselves. Apart from the fatal objection that no amount of obscuring or suppression can make Christ anything but a wicked deceiver if He were not what He claimed to be; that that claim, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," is either true or most audacious blasphemy; that the morality of the New Testament, which all prize, receives a deadly blow if Jesus did not rise again and go back into heaven; that those who pronounce the whole to be a mere fiction, are more consistent

Digitized by Google

than those who take what suits them, and treat the rest as surplus cargo;—apart from that, there is this terrible pit before us. We know what the world came to be from false conceptions of God. Are we going with a light heart to let go our sheet-anchor; to see no longer God manifested in Christ; to enter the downward path before any society to which God is declared unknowable because unknown? For if God is not revealed in Christ, if Christ is not the fullest expression of the Father Himself, we are where men were before He came; no higher conception of the Godhead can we evolve out of our own consciousness.

These are things we ought to consider before we let the fascination of some skilfully constructed tale, which we yield to simply because it interests us, rob us, before we know it, of everything which brings God near us, or makes Christ's goodness a thing which we can continue logically to believe in.

"Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see, for many prophets and kings desired to see the things that ye see." What will it be to wake up and find that we have blinded ourselves to the world's great vision, the revelation of the Father?

His own words are our warning as well as our consolation.



Digitized by Google

## *THE HOLY GHOST THE REVEALER OF THE SON.*

"When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all Truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come."—ST. JOHN xvi. 13.

OUR Lord is teaching the disciples about the Holy Spirit, His distinct Person, His Office, His Work. His method is a wonderful instance of the sublime and unwearied patience which characterizes the true preacher of deep things—there is no haste, no impatience, no effort at making things short by leaving them imperfect. The Person of the Holy Spirit has to be put before them in a distinct way, as no mere symbol of the Divine Energy, but as one Who is, Who is One with Christ, and Who, while bringing Christ back again, is yet a distinct Person. The Son had revealed the Father; the Holy Spirit would reveal the Son. That was His work. But before He could come and do this great work for the disciples, it was

Digitized by Google

necessary that they should have a clear idea of Him as a Person distinct from Him Who was now speaking to them, and so He goes over the first steps of His teaching again and again—tries to make them conscious of their needs, their orphaned condition, their weakness and the satisfaction for these wants which the Holy Spirit could give them. Very patient He is with their mistakes, very gradual in His method, very indifferent about apparent contradictions so that real contradictions were avoided. He Who "knew what was in man" opened their minds gradually to conceive of this coming revelation of a Personal Spirit who should be "with them and in them"—should take up His dwelling in men and among men.

So He taught them till by degrees the ideas assumed shape and content, and they were trained to survive the shock of His departure, and to wait as "with one accord in one place" till the Power should descend, as on this day, upon them.

It is a luminous and comforting thought that this same patience which characterized Christ in His teaching of the disciples has and does and will characterize the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Unwearied patience is the characteristic of His method. He Who has been with us and among us, a distinct Person, since the Day of Pentecost, invisible yet real, has been making known through ages the

Digitized by Google

infinite truths which are embodied in the Revelation of Christ. The mistakes of men, the errors of men, the blindness of men, the passions of men have often, in the very Body itself, seemed to obscure this Presence. Not merely the nations outside, but the Church itself has seemed again and again to have "not so much as heard whether there be a Holy Ghost." He, the Spirit of Love, has been forgotten altogether in days of fierce persecution and bitter intolerance. He, the Spirit of Truth has been forgotten in days of listless indifference and apathetic carelessness about Revelation itself. He Whose work is never exhausted has been ignored by a contemptuous dogmatism which has prided itself on having exhausted the inexhaustible by its formulas, or by an antiquarianism which is ever delving in the past, and has no ear for the voice sounding in its ears. But His patience has never been exhausted. The gift is for the ages—for all time. The Revelation of Christ is His work. Christ is the great real want of humanity; and the result of His work is that every age, with all its faults and drawbacks and contradictions, has seen in Christ something more—has gained a deeper insight into the character which He came to reveal. Each age has seen its best idea * embodied in the same living Christ, but its idea was

* Church's Sermons, "Civilization and Religion," p. 110.

Digitized by Google

not adequate to the truth—there was something still beyond. And this work which has been so gradual, so patiently carried out through opposition, in spite of faithlessness and contradictions,—this work, little by little, is being carried on, and the result is that "the things of Christ" are coming nearer and becoming more vivid, the secret is being told, the inmost realities are being displayed. There is no standing still, no possibility of exhaustion, no stationariness; as man's powers grow, moral, intellectual, physical, so new possibilities are evolved, new depths unfolded. A more patient habit of mind, a more careful observation, reveals the secrets of the natural world; the aspirations of men themselves towards progress and liberty and union of nations reveal fresh depths of promise in the Gospel itself. Not only in the Body, but outside, wherever noble impulses move men, wherever their dreams set in the direction of a more self-sacrificing life and a more brotherly sharing of advantages or of empire based upon justice and fairness, and no longer upon mere physical force—there we recognize the whisperings of the Holy Spirit, the clearer revelation of the Name, *i.e.* the Nature and Character of Christ Himself. "The Wind still bloweth where it listeth;" "the Spirit of the Lord is filling the whole world." Still the work is going on towards completion. "He shall

Digitized by Google

guide you into all truth;" not merely into fragments, but into its fulness. Truth in its outlines is definite and clear enough, but in its innermost substance it is inexhaustible. No wonder men rebel and go astray when they are taught in a hard and dry manner that they must believe so many propositions, and that then they will know all God's Revelation of Himself. No wonder, for there is within themselves a witness which tells them that no phrases can do more than suggest the real fulness of the truth which they enshrine. In reality no event happens that touches men, and no movement of men's minds takes place, without the one and the other throwing some fresh light on the bearings of the Revelation of Christ in the life of men. "The Life was manifested, and we have seen It"—seen It as historical, as really lived; but there are depths in It beyond which we are seeing. We are seeing It through events of human history, through the movements of our own day, if only we are listening for the tones of that unbidden Voice, which is sounding as truly and really within the ears of those who have "ears to hear" as the Voice of Jesus sounded of old on the lake-shore, or on the hills of Galilee. We need not strain our eyes enviously backward, and covet the half-lights of past centuries. We have all their lights, and a light upon their

Digitized by Google

lights. There is no finality in the dispensation of the Spirit; each age learns the lessons it is able to bear. The Holy Spirit, like Christ Himself, has "many things still to say to us, but we cannot bear them now," and, like Christ, His patience in waiting till we can bear them is inexhaustible.

The Holy Spirit, then, throws the light in every age on human history, on the movements of men's minds, and connects them with the gradually emerging depths which the Life of Christ displays. His work is perpetual and ever-advancing; but it is true to its great object—the manifesting of Christ. Nothing can divert His work. Again and again fanaticism has tried, and tried in vain, to disconnect His work from the Revelation of Christ, and the Divine Life which He came to bring home to us. "He shall not speak of Himself," said Christ. Again and again men have tried to misrepresent His work; have spoken of an illuminating Spirit Who made the Gospel obsolete; have tried to disconnect the work of the Holy Spirit from that main purpose, "He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you," which Christ laid down so clearly. Men have become so filled with the idea of an illuminating Spirit that they have been induced to cut themselves adrift from the past, and look for a new Revelation from Him—to expect another Day of Pentecost. So it

Digitized by Google

was with some of the Franciscans in the thirteenth century, brethren and sisters of Free Spirit in the fourteenth century, the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, some of the Quakers in the seventeenth; so it is with not a few now who are revolting from a dull materialism, but have no safe-standing ground from which to oppose it. In their minds the Spirit speaks *of* Itself. Such is not the Spirit Christ foreshadowed, for "He shall speak whatsoever He hears." He will not make us impatient of a Lord and Master, but desirous of One; eager to give ourselves up to His guidance; eager to enter into the inner meaning and purpose of His Life; eager to get rid of our own fancies that hinder our vision, and to enter into fellowship with others. True, He will never let us be satisfied; He will not let us think that advanced knowledge and wide discovery can ever be final. He will always be pointing on; He will show us "things that are coming;" He will show us new and deep meanings in truths which are the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, yet whose meaning cannot be ever here fully realized. That they will only be when the Spirit's mission is accomplished here on earth; when the Son of God is completely and entirely manifested.

This, then, is before us. With infinite patience, gradually as men can bear it, the Holy Spirit is

Digitized by Google

revealing Christ to the world. He is making no new Revelation, but increasingly the inmost depths of the One Life are being manifested. And the vision is not the mere revealing of the Son of Man, *i.e.* of what is most glorious in Humanity. "All things that the Father hath are Mine," says He. All the glory of Godhead shines in Manhood; through Christ alone we know the Father, know the Nature and Character of God, know the original goodness and love and truth which we are created to long for and to show forth; through Christ we know the Father, and through the patient, gradual lessons of the Holy Spirit, lessons that come to us in the Church, in human history, we gain the fuller knowledge of Christ's Life.

All that we have to care for is that when we say, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," we remember that to believe in Him means to listen for a Divine message; and to listen for a Divine message is to keep open every single avenue through which God's Word may come to us, to clear ourselves of wilful sins, to clear our minds of distorting prejudices, to pray for light, to study the One Life in the Gospel, to read, to study reverently the records of the past in the light of the present, to welcome as fellow-helpers all who even unconsciously are longing for the reign of perfect goodness.

Digitized by Google

And if we want to learn a lesson from Him on this special Sunday, there is none more needful than the inexhaustible patience which characterizes His work. We live in an age when everything is done in a hurry, when the cry is for results, when we chafe at slow movements in life, and the result is a certain shallowness, the evidences of which are all around us.

Life is full of puzzles to which we can find no answer, full of sorrows for which we can find no remedy. It is useless to ignore the one and the other. If we are to be of any use in our generation we must feel them deeply. But the feeling them will only quicken our cry, "Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire," for we know there is an answer to every question and a cure for every sorrow, if only our eyes could be open to see that heavenly order which is slowly and surely being fulfilled around us; and surely, if we are faithful to the gradually unfolding light, the day will dawn, the darkness will pass, and in His light, Who is Light itself, we shall see Light.

Digitized by Google

# *THE GUIDANCE OF RELIGIOUS EMOTION.*

"Jesus saith unto her, Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God."—ST. JOHN xx. 17.

MARY MAGDALENE, when she met our Lord after His resurrection, made a great, but, as we should say, very natural mistake. She thinks only of the joy of His recovered Presence. She is like one of us welcoming back a dear friend, who was supposed, *e.g.*, to be lost at sea, but suddenly reappears. She, with her Oriental habits, flings herself at His feet, and clasps them as though she would never more be separated from Him. She forgets, quite naturally, all else save that He, her Rescuer from trouble, Who was dead, is alive again. All the old patient teaching about the manner of His coming, about the ultimate joy of fellowship of spirit with spirit, "the joy no man taketh from you," is forgotten. It is the earthly

Digitized by Google

Friend and Counsellor and Guide who has reappeared. She is in an ecstasy of delight; all else has faded away; and it seems so natural and simple that we almost resent the half-coldness of the "Touch Me not." Why should He be so reserved with her and so tender to others; repel her from His feet, and invite another to "reach hither his hands, and thrust them into His side," or the whole company of apostles to "handle Him and see"? Why does He reprove Mary for simply clasping His feet? Does He mean to remind her of old days? Is He shrinking from her touch as if she had been polluted? The answer is obvious enough to the student of the Greek Testament. The touching He rebukes is not the touch which would convince Mary of the reality of His Body. The word really means, "Take not hold of Me," *i.e.* hold Me not with a holding that implies a wish to retain. It was a reminder of those spiritual lessons He had taught her. "Do not cling to the bodily form, the merely external, but aspire to that true fellowship of spirit, which remains when you see Me no more. Do not think My regained Presence is a gift and privilege for yourself, and seek to appropriate Me, but go and make known to others all that it means, all that it involves." He would have no man "know Him after the flesh," save to test the reality of His risen Body; all His intercourse

Digitized by Google

with others after the Resurrection was really to help them to rise to spiritual fellowship, to be true to the Master out of sight.

No doubt this special and emphatic warning given to Mary had a special meaning for her, and for all who share her peculiar temperament. The lesson it conveys was given to others gradually, to her sharply and decisively. It was a warning about the special danger incidental to her case, the danger of religious excitement; of mistaking emotion for real religion. All extreme and feverish excitement was dangerous to her. Out of her had been cast seven devils, *i.e.* she was delivered from a kind of mania, which disturbed the balance of the moral as well as of the mental nature. Where there had been this perilous derangement, any violent excitement was to be avoided. Such a temperament is peculiarly apt to relapse under some great strain of joy or sorrow, and if it relapse its last state is likely to be worse than its first. The joy of the Resurrection was scarcely less perilous to her than the sorrow of the burial. Therefore it was that Christ checked her joy while He showed Himself to her before any others. He checks and moderates her joy by fixing her mind on a great spiritual truth, the new relation of man to God, by calling her to active service, giving her something to do, by compelling her to think

Digitized by Google

of others rather than herself. So her emotions would run into safe channels. She would have a great thought—"My Father and your Father"—to relieve her self-absorption; she would have something to do for Him which would occupy her. How could He have better ministered to a mind once diseased and still open to disease? How could He have better shown a love more wise and tender and more characteristic of Himself? Surely we have a lesson here about a difficult matter which is certain, sooner or later, to come before us.

I. It shows us the true method of dealing with religious movements which have a tendency to excessive emotion. Many people have no tendencies and no dangers in that direction. They are in no kind of danger of extreme religious emotion, or, indeed, of any emotion at all. Their danger is rather in another direction. Nothing moves them, and their religion is a cold and unemotional observance of a certain fixed routine. They do their duty according to their conception of it to God and man, but duty is lit up by no fire of enthusiasm. They fall into the opposite extreme; they would never require the check, "Touch Me not;" they would never have been at the sepulchre—their need is quite in another direction. And often they are the most severe critics of the

Digitized by Google

enthusiasms and mistakes of others. Often they rush into the unenviable position of being mere critics, and going, like Balaam, from hill to hill to try to find a point from which they may curse Israel, without endeavouring to turn the fire of enthusiasm into safe channels.

Surely our Master teaches them and all of us a lesson. No doubt there is a closer fellowship with Him than the mere clasping of His feet, which religious emotionalism represents; but it is at least further on the road to that closer fellowship than an attitude of cool indifference or cultivated criticism. His own method with Mary gives us something to think about. It was not merely the repressive method. He did not merely warn her against an exaggerated emotionalism, and leave her chilled and out of heart. He did not act as some of those who have represented Him here have done, as the official Church of England did to Wesley in the last century, as, too, one must say, the official element in the Church of England has done to some movements in our generation. He recognized her enthusiasm, and diverted it into a safer channel. He did not say merely, "Lay not hold of Me," but "Go to My brethren," and carry to them this wondrous announcement of a realized spiritual fellowship. Surely His method is always true; something to think about,

Digitized by Google

something to do, is the corrective, both with individuals and movements, for excessive emotionalism, whatever direction it takes. It is of little use to point out merely dangers when people's souls are on fire; words of warning are no doubt needed as to all kinds of excess, in cases of exaggerated emotionalism as well as in undue ceremonialism, but those who do nothing but warn will be listened to, as though they were tempters, with suspicion and dislike. And if even warnings are only of use when accompanied by great tenderness and largeness of allowance, what are we to say of what we find, so often and so fatally in Church history, a mere policy of denunciation, which makes no attempts at understanding, which is eager to fasten upon movements a reproach and a stigma—what can we say but that of all who have incurred the awful reproach that they have made the "heart of the righteous sad whom God has not made sad," none have incurred it so largely as those whose instinct is invariably to denounce before they inquire, and to caricature what they will not take the trouble to understand. Nothing makes tender hearts so hopeless, nothing chills enthusiasm so uselessly, as a policy of mere denunciation; and surely what we want to do is not to increase the sum of the world's hopelessness, not to diminish its enthusiasm, but to turn it into safer channels. It is to be feared that

Digitized by Google

there is growing within the Church of England a dread of emotionalism, and a disposition merely to denounce it, which may end by depriving her of a large source of influence. For there are those all around us over whose heads all ordinary appeals to reason and conscience seem to pass, but who can be brought to their highest life, it seems, only through appeals to their feelings; and what we have to consider is how such persons are to be brought to live their true lives, not whether we like or dislike certain methods. Even the Salvation Army tells us roughly and loosely of a gap in her system which the Church ought to supply. God forbid we should supply it by a slavish copy of its methods; but the very fact of its continued existence ought to teach us something of the inadequacy of our methods. It would be sad, and I venture to think that the disciples of that movement are capable of no higher level of religious feeling than their present proceedings seem to testify. Many of its leaders are earnest, devoted men who have found no outlet for their enthusiasm in other religious systems. One of the pressing questions, then, of the day is how we are to arouse the religious emotions and guide them in a more reverent fashion. This we shall never do by our existing Church services. It is of little use to speak in "an unknown tongue" now, as in St. Paul's



Digitized by Google

day, "unless some one interpret;" and, beautiful as our services are, and dear to us by association, they are practically in an unknown tongue to many around us. The question is always coming home to us town clergy, and it is, after preserving the faith unimpaired, the nearest question to one's heart, how is the religious motive ever to be brought to bear upon people who never enter a church, not because they are irreligious, but because the idea never seems to enter into their heads, and who, even if they are galvanized by some strong influence into one, feel and look while there hopelessly distraught and at sea? Where is the point of contact to be found? Sometimes, and increasingly, as I have said here before, in the increased realization of the social consequences of the Life of Christ; but sometimes, also, in some strong and fervent and sustained appeal to their religious emotions.

Are we, then, it might be said, to abandon our present position, the sober and well-regulated appeal of the Church of England to the reason and conscience, the reliance on the historic faith, for the sake of religious excitement? God forbid. It is not necessary to abandon anything nor to do anything to distress faithful worshippers. To recognize the great mass outside and its needs, to see that it needs other methods than existing ones, to relax

Digitized by Google

our rigid systems, with a view, not to creating religious excitement, but of reaching those who can only be reached by their feelings,—this is our need. It is the preaching friar, not copied in a servile fashion from other times, but the preaching friar adapted to the age, whom we want; not to displace parochial efforts and sober work, but to supplement it, to do what it cannot do by itself. It is the insistence upon the perpetual command which all who come to Christ need, that they should go to the brethren in some active service; it is the recognizing in the widest sense that every one "has" a gift, and should never rest till in the widest sense he had found a "ministry;" it is in such ways that Christ shows us the safe method of dealing with emotionalism.

II. And to pass from dealing with bodies to individuals—the true principle is surely here. There are, there always will be those with whom religion seems to take the form of intense feeling—of feeling that sometimes seems divided from any corresponding sense of duty. Such persons declare themselves perpetually by their language; they are full of enthusiasms for what is beautiful and artistic, what is touching and moving; they are not so keenly sensitive about what is just and what is true. They delight in religious services, with the accompaniment of what they conceive to be an adequate ceremonial,

Digitized by Google

or they prize highly some emotional oratory of a fluent and morally unexciting type. These are the necessary settings for the jewel they prize, but often the jewel seems lost in the setting, and though it is easy to find out their preferences and the objects of their admiration, it is difficult to discover at what precise point of character and action those influences affect them. Now, it is often the habit of people who are above all else logical in their religious ideas to criticize them severely, even to declare that their religion is a sham and a delusion, because it does not work this or that change in them. It is here that a wiser tone and a juster method are so requisite. Let us try to do all we can for such people, by leading them in the Christian spirit to go to their brethren, *i.e.* to do something for others, by reminding them that the test of all real Christianity is willingness to sacrifice self for others; that, instead of making individual preferences a perpetual occasion of division, they should strive after mutual fellowship and rejoice in the great revelation of a common Christianity and a common God, which they share with those who on other matters are at issue with them. But to dismiss all their feelings as sentiment, and to call it unreal, because it does not govern their whole life, is to throw them back into despair. You cannot make

Digitized by Google

people reasonable in their religion, or in anything else, by sneering at feeling, or by eliminating its undoubted power. Let us learn to deal tenderly, as our Master did, with those who seem too much to be governed by emotion, to the exclusion of reason and conscience.

But if this needs to be said on one side as regards others, it cannot be too strongly urged on all those who have now succeeded to the great and magnificent opportunities of this place, that you should not merely yield to the kind of emotionalism that comes from the religious influences around you, the solemn warnings from the past, the mediæval atmosphere with which Oxford surrounds you, but that you should here and now, by study and thought, lay the foundation of a reasonable service, and, by trying to widen your sympathies, keep touch with the tendencies of your time. Beautiful buildings that tell of the past, that link one to the historic Church, have a certain value, a place in one's training, an emotional influence one is glad to revive in later life, when our lines are cast amid the uninspiring dulness of modern architecture. There is an imperceptible appeal in the very air of Oxford to the higher feelings of many natures; but it will not do to lean on that crutch to support you amidst the difficulties of the day and the problems of nineteenth-century life. The sense

Digitized by Google

of a religious halo is not religion; it may only conduce to a selfishness, and that none the less deadly because it comes under the shadowy guise of a cultivated appreciation. What men in any department of life who are to do Christ's work in this generation are needing is something much more. It is a study of Christ's Life as the only revelation that can satisfy you of what God really is. "This is eternal life," is life indeed, life in its intensity, "to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent;" to learn to say the greatest prayer, "Hallowed be Thy Name;" to know a Holy God revealed in Christ;—this is the one foundation that will bear the shock of criticism, will survive the dilletante trifling of our day. And in order to gain this knowledge, study both intellectual and devout is the one paramount duty of our day. This is the cure of sentimentalism, the corrective of an untamed enthusiasm, the inspiration of mere philanthropy, above all, the source and fountain of the widest sympathies, the kindliest deeds, the brotherly spirit. The man who leaves Oxford with a real acquaintance with his New Testament, and a habit of devout appreciation of the secret of Christ's Life, leaves it with something which will not fail him in the day of trial, even if he "dwell in Mesech, or have his habitation among the tents of Kedar." This is the secret of the

Digitized by Google

religious influence, so often felt conspicuously in this place, which can make wide allowances and safeguard all sentiment, that gives to some men their magic power; this is the thing that, once learnt never leaves a man; yet it is the fruit of secret wrestlings, and longings, and hours of sustained study. Such an influence may God send forth in abundance from this place as the means of perpetuating, amid the countless opportunities of active service which modern life presents, the great example of our Master.

Digitized by Google

## *THE INCOMPLETENESS OF REVELATION.*

"I know in part."—1 Cor. xiii. 9.

All of us are familiar with a prevailing temper of mind in the present day to which the religion of Christ presents difficulties, because it presents to them mysterious doctrines, like the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. They stumble at the very name of mystery; they ask for simplicity and clearness of detail; they are offended at any suggestion of a patient waiting for the further elucidation of things not yet fully understood. They desire immediate, instant satisfaction, an answer to every question, a solution of every difficulty. Obviously they do not and cannot have it. If they could only see it, their very asking it shows how much they misconceive the whole position. God's Revelation does not propose and nowhere professes to give us perfect knowledge, or even to disclose to us abstract truth. The very

Digitized by Google

method through which it was given precludes the idea. It was given piecemeal and through living men; it was given through a presentment of facts, through which truth can be discovered rather than by a direct disclosure of truth; it was given not so much as knowledge, but as the power and opportunity of gaining knowledge. This of itself precludes and prevents the idea of its having an answer to every question and a solution of every difficulty, for it is only through our own effort that any vital apprehension of its substance comes to us. Nothing comes to us as mere knowledge through Christ's religion. We know, no doubt, the meaning of the words, but the ideas are beyond the words, and we only bore our way into them by living. In order to teach the Christian Revelation, there is more than learning required on one side and attention on the other. If the figure of the Sower represents the true idea, there must be a correspondence of effort on the part of the recipient. There is no Divine knowledge in the sense of an unfolding of the intellect apart from the heart and the will, and the real meaning of the deepest truths can only be learnt by those truths being lived upon.

This is especially and pre-eminently the case with regard to the great doctrine before us to-day. The doctrine of the Trinity as stated in text-books raises

Digitized by Google

questions about the Being of God, some of which cannot be answered. You can say certain things about it. The Confession of Faith commonly called the Creed of St. Athanasius puts into words certain aspects of doctrine in an abstract fashion and these abstract statements have a great value for us. So great is their value that one could wish that we might have them apart from the anathemas with which the unfortunate habit of an age which was enamoured with the policy of anathema has enclosed them, and which serve only to prejudice the minds of many Churchmen against them. No doubt the Athanasian Creed requires retranslation. Some of its expressions are misleading through the changed meaning of such words as "Person" and "Substance." But in itself it is a clear and most precious statement of revealed truth on the highest subjects, and for that reason one is sorry to see people shut their Prayer-books when its recitation commences. Nevertheless the abstract statement, valuable as it is, is not the form in which the conception first came to man; it is an interpretation of the facts at which the consciousness of the Church slowly arrived and embodied in these statements. And even when we have mastered these statements intellectually we are not much further. It is in and through our individual growth, through the experience of life that the know-

Digitized by Google

ledge really comes. We learn through our wants and needs, our bitter loneliness, our sense of homelessness, to know the Father. We learn through our craving for an ideal, or through our sense of sin, to know the Son. We learn through our conscious want of light and comfort to know the Blessed Spirit. And so we come to recognize a Divine Trinity, which is no transitory manifestation of three aspects of One Person. The experience of life teaches us how God acts, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we gather up these lessons into the simplest formula, and so confess our faith.

Here, then, and always, the answer to the objections about the mysterious character of religion is the same. Truth is not speculative, but practical. Do, and you will know. "If any man will do His Will, he shall know of the doctrine." The facts of Christmas, Easter, and Whitsunday may be looked upon simply as far-off mysteries; they may be speculated about, argued over, and remain barren, or they may be believed in, translated into human life, and understood. The Revelation of Trinity Sunday of the Nature of God may be treated in the same way. Argued over, disputed about, it remains barren; but if it become the rule and motive of life, the explanation of surrounding facts through which we discern Him Who is the True Living God, "in

Digitized by Google

Whom we live and move and have our being"—Who satisfies the last wants of the soul for a home and for an ideal, Who is bringing in a new world through the chaos that encompasses us, then we begin to see the hollowness of objecting to mystery. It depends really on our use of the facts, on our attitude towards them, and when we see this we cease to stumble at the mystery which enfolds them; we see the possibilities of endless satisfaction and growth which mysteries involve. So much may be said, and said quite honestly, about the mysterious character of Revelation.

Still, there is a vague sense that all is not as clear as it might be—that the enemy has an advantage. It is necessary in these matters to clear the ground. Let us look at the Bible. The Bible is quite clear upon this point of the mysteriousness of Revelation. It never goes about to gratify even natural curiosity. It is admittedly a partial Revelation; only its dimness is not meant merely to perplex and baffle us, but to lead us on till we "know even as we are known." The Bible cannot be understood without the words "we know in part." We know something of a great many things and everything of nothing. We know something of God—His Nature, the relation of the Father to the Son and to the Holy Spirit—but we are confessedly ignorant of the

Digitized by Google

solution of many of the questions that may be raised about the Divine government and the destiny of man. If this had always been recognized, much bewilderment would have been saved, and much consequent doubt would have been spared. Men have been taught to use the Bible as an encyclopedia, and it has failed them; while others have used it for a certain purpose, like a guide uses his signs, or a sailor uses his chart for a voyage, and it has not failed them. Men have looked to it for a Revelation in history, science, philosophy, and they have found in it statements which cannot be harmonized with other statements, or which are obviously only the floating ideas of the generation in which they were written, and they have given up their beliefs in despair. If they had treated the Bible fairly, they would have seen that it never pretends to teach them anything except that knowledge which we call ethical or spiritual, which has to do with man living his true life now and hereafter. The Bible is meant for the training of man, to reconcile man to God, and to reveal the Divine Character, "the King in His beauty;" and it is meant also to reveal man to himself, and there it stops. All the deductions which men make from it to support this or that system of government, or this or that theory of social progress, are deductions which may have more or less to be said in their favour, but they are

Digitized by Google

not part of the original purpose with which the Bible was written. All its view of history, all its study of character, all its presentment of facts, has but one end in view—the training of man here through example and precept, moral and spiritual, for a greater life hereafter. And a great factor in this spiritual training is the awakening and cultivation of faith through the presentment of mysteries.

No doubt a certain class of mind will always chafe impatiently under these limitations. No doubt the last and hardest lesson for many to learn is, as has been said, that "lowly thinking about self" which the New Testament is always pressing upon us. No doubt it is hard, in days when men in other fields of enterprise can secure such accurate results and make such amazing discoveries, to say simply that we cannot secure the same results in another field, or make analogous discoveries. No doubt the triumphs of the world of pure intelligence dazzle us and make it difficult to take the humble position of saying, "we know in part," "we see through a glass darkly." We cannot answer every question or solve every difficulty about revelation; there are mysteries deep and ever deeper beyond. We cannot give a scientific account of the Being of God. It seems hard to take up the humble position of owning that we cannot answer all questions in an age when new

Digitized by Google

knowledge is flooding the world; it seems hard, but surely it is a position that is not only honest and true, but also has much to say for itself in other ways, for the very partialness of Revelation, the admitted partialness, leaves us so much to hope for. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." The very presence of mystery opens new worlds of discovery, and even though this does not attract all of us; though we have not the enthusiasm of progress within us, and want, or think we want, to go on as we are; though the dimness and half-lights of the world beyond fail to move us; though we creatures of time and sense cannot imagine what it is to pass out of time and sense and crave to know something tangible—yet the very cry of impatience, "If there is anything to know, let us know it," only shows our childishness and our utter need of such limitations. And beyond all, there is the hopelessness of anything else. Where else are we to look for answers to our deepest questions? Where else? To what philosophy or theory of life? Where shall we find another answer to help men out of unrest and untruth? Surely we feel the wisdom as well as the fitness of St. Peter's attitude. When Christ uttered hard sayings, "Many went back; they walked no more with Him." It was too difficult for them. St. Peter went straight to the bottom of things: "Lord,

Digitized by Google

to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." He could not see through every difficulty, but such words had dropped from those lips that Peter felt, "Never man spake like this Man," and he was too deeply conscious of his uttermost needs to look elsewhere. And is it not the cry still of those who do not understand everything, but who feel the unearthliness of His life, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" There are difficulties, mysteries, perplexities, and unanswerable questions, but "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of Eternal Life." There are the echoes of that unforgotten Voice still lingering in our ears, that told us of ourselves and of Himself, that which no difficulty can ever obscure or no doubt can ever darken.

A great writer has said that in all speculations in the field of moral inquiry the best beginning is "from the facts that lie nearest to ourselves." So it is with the mysteries of religion: it is safest to start from the groundwork of our personal experience from what we have lived on and found the meaning of. It was on this St. Paul threw himself back when the cultivated intelligence of the day was all against him. "I know," he cries, "Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." Let us recognize that there is a personal experience

Digitized by Google

which is not necessarily mischievously dogmatic about others, but is content to rest for its utmost certainty in the consciousness that the "Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit."

Let me press on you two consequences from these considerations—

I. There are two great dangers, always changing their shape, yet ever recurrent, which are the inevitable results of a partial revelation made to men as men are. One is the danger of over-dogmatism. We read Church history to little purpose if we do not see that from the spirit of over-dogmatism, always more or less imperious and tyrannical, have sprung the greatest evils—the schism of the East from the West, the great rupture of the sixteenth century, the infinite varieties of Protestantism. This result may have been inevitable (and it is certainly impossible often to distribute the niceties of praise and blame for it), but it is none the less unfavourable to the real interests of truth. Even now there is little difference among Christians on the primary truths which can be said to be explicitly revealed, and which answer to the test, *quod semper quod ubique quod ab omnibus;* and it is to be hoped that the very antagonism which Christianity has now to meet may force those separated sooner or later to learn to agree to differ on secondary matters. At any rate, let us not have it



Digitized by Google

to answer for at the end that by over-dogmatism on secondary matters, and by consequent misrepresentations, suspicions, rivalries, jealousies, and heart-burnings we have added to the sum of those divisions which every real lover of truth must deplore. By discarding this spirit we shall draw nearer to all who "love the Lord Jesus Christ with sincerity." And even beyond the pale of the Christian Church, if we are conscious of a fervour and energy around us which "makes for righteousness," and yet cares nothing for what we care for, and owns no sympathy with us on that which is dearest to us, we can at least candidly recognize the earnestness and zeal often displayed in such quarters for the promotion of great ends, and can learn the lesson which they really teach us—that if there had never been narrowness within, we should have retained much of that fervour and earnestness which is now apparently arrayed against us.

In days like these it is necessary to remember that over-dogmatism is often the parent of reaction and, alas! of recoil also. There are all around us a number of minds not made up, wavering amid the strife of tongues, knowing what has to be said on either side and unable to balance it, acted on by the currents of opposing tendencies, keenly alive to the unfairness and mere verbal *finesse* which so often characterizes clerical disputation, watching and waiting to see not so much where the last word is said,

Digitized by Google

but where the highest moral qualities are shown, before it makes up its mind. Who shall say what steps have before now been turned out of the way by the stars that wanted to be suns, and to give a light they have not reflected? Who does not know of such men? Who has not shuddered before now at seeing them exposed to the perilous influences of a blatant and unfair dogmatism, or the childish speculations of some enterprising divine who is hopelessly incapable of seeing two sides to any question?

II. We are alive to this danger. What is the other? Surely it is the danger of being too sensitive to the claims of such persons; the danger of failing to give a strong, fearless, outspoken witness to the truth; a danger of being (we hardly like to say the words) "ashamed of the Gospel of Christ;" the danger of not saying what we know confidently because others say more than we think that they can know. Surely we need to watch ourselves here. We have the ages behind us. We cannot quail or be cowed when we think of the inheritance of faith and heroism we have received from them. Let us dare to be brave, to trust our own cause and the world's hope. Let us dare to be faithful to what we know that the Master Himself has taught us, even amid the difficulties of our day, till we pass on to give up our charge at the foot of His Everlasting Throne.

Digitized by Google

## *CHRIST'S WORDS.*

"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."—ST. JOHN vi. 63.

ONE of the things that helps to raise our spirits and to keep us hopeful about the future influence of the Christian ideal is the increased disposition to dwell rather on the words of Christ than on His miracles as evidencing the truth of His claims. It is hopeful for this reason. An age or a nation that wants miracles to support its tottering beliefs in the supernatural, an age that, "except it sees signs and wonders, will not believe," is not likely to advance in any real conception of high Christian ideals. A longing for miracles, for the manifestation of the extraordinary, the preternatural, is akin to the superstition that made men cruel enough to burn people as witches; it never betokens in an age or a nation that real seriousness and soberness of thought which is a sign of real progress and elevation. But this is an encouraging fact, that Christ's words are increasingly I believe, studied and thought about and pondered over, and that that

Digitized by Google

is bringing men and Churches together, bringing them in the real way—not by argument, but by elevation of aim and purpose—to Christ; that every new light, too, on Christ's words is gladly welcomed, and welcomed, too, by those whose minds perhaps no other evidence of the supernatural would really touch. This, at any rate, gives something to hope for and something to try to work upon, and shows a state of mind we ought to try to speak to. Christ led us to expect this when He spoke of His words as being "spirit and life," as belonging to the region of the eternal, and capable of conveying real life.

I. Is not this, I would ask, the radical, the fundamental difference between Christ's words and any other ever spoken by other philosophers or moralists, that they are "spirit," that they belong to the region of the eternal? I am not now pressing the question of relative moral height, or of the nature of the Christian motive as compared with other motives that may be presented by any other system; those are separate and distinct questions. But I want to press this point. Christ's words are different fundamentally, different essentially from those of other philosophers and moralists, because they belong to the eternal, and they show this by the way they estimate the persons to whom they are addressed. They are for moral agents, no doubt, for people living with definite duties

Digitized by Google

here and now (we may never forget it), but they are first and foremost for immortal beings. They point to an immortality not merely of absorption, but to a personal immortality as a condition of their being intelligible; they appeal to the instinct of immortality in men, and in this they are "spirit;" they prove themselves higher than the greatest precepts of Seneca, or Marcus Aurelius, or Confucius, or Buddha—than the greatest thoughts ever conceived of by great moral teachers; they make the appeals of the Gospel so different from any appeal to men as being merely moral agents; they are felt at once to be appeals to those who are *conscious of immortality.* Enshrined, so to speak, in the heart of the Gospel, there is a conception of man's nature, so great, so deep, so far-reaching, that itself constitutes a claim for it to have its own unique place in the world's history. If you want real proof that the Gospel came not "from men, but from God," you find it in the evidence that Christ's sayings show of his deep sense of the greatness of man's nature. Take such a saying as this (there are plenty like it), "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." There is a depth in it unparalleled in other systems. It is not a question of difference of degree, but of difference of kind. It touches the heart and the conscience, but it goes even deeper; it touches

Digitized by Google

the soul. It appeals to us as being immortal, and finds us out because we are.* Its full force does not dawn on us all at once, I admit. At the beginning, when first we begin to think seriously, such words seem enigmatic enough to us; they convey a dim meaning only, but they grow with us because they are "life;" they reveal new depths even when we think we have got to their bottom and exhausted them. Take these words. At first they seem a call to suffer death, to lose life, to die, as we say. This was what those who heard them had to expect, and so their meaning came to them. Even that first meaning is a truth, and a truth they needed to learn if they were to be supported through the trials that were before them. But as they lived, this truth expanded and grew into all sorts of new shapes; they saw in it ever-deepening meanings. It told them not merely that persecution and death were to be admired, but it set before them this—that all high and real life here below would grow out of self-forgetfulness and of union with Christ; that all putting out of sight of self-seeking would lead to man's finding his true self with Christ in God; that if ever life was to grow, it would not be by mere selfish preservation, but by flinging it into some activity, some form of resolute service for Christ's sake; that to wish to "save the soul" by

* Ainger's "Sermons," p. 41.

Digitized by Google

keeping it out of trial was the sure way to lose it; that any mere desire for salvation as a means of personal comfort was delusive; and that only in and by the self-forgetfulness, the "abandon," the flinging away of self into something difficult, something arduous, some personal service, could the soul's life be kept healthy and true.

No doubt we may still hear a strange and wild parody of this truth in the Christian Church. No doubt the doctrines of rewards and punishments is often still stated with a hardness and a nakedness that sets all our spiritual sensitiveness on edge. All I say is, that there is now more understanding, a deeper appreciation of sayings like these; that they are at the bottom of much quiet, unobtrusive, and real Christian work, the stay and support of thousands, because of their depth, because of the immensely profound view they take of man's nature, because they are "spirit and life;" not because they are a mere immediate theory of action—"Do this, and you will be better"—but because they appeal to the infinite developments which can only be worked out under conditions of immortality, because they are an appeal to the soul and spirit. For the soul-appeal is the deepest of all. The appeal to the heart is moving; alas! it is apt to be terribly transient. The appeal to the conscience is also apt to be terribly

Digitized by Google

distorted by nervous fears or weakened by past neglect. "Do it because I love you," is all many want; "Do it because you ought," meets the case of some; but neither one appeal nor the other gets into the depths of man's nature. But when it comes thus, "Do it because your nature is so great as to be about to carry on in wider and deeper spheres the preparations for life which you are here and now making," that touches us with an awful and yet a most elevating sense of what we are; it lifts us up above our ordinary life; it convinces us that Christ's words are spirit, belong to eternal being, reveal to us the depths of our nature, and fit in with our highest ideals.

Or take the command to "be perfect, as your Father in heaven." At first sight it is an injunction that plunges us into the depth of despair; it not merely seems so impossible for ourselves, but its fulfilment in any adequate sense in others seems so hopeless. We know goodness here in others, we know heroism, we know what we can reverence, but hardly shall we say soberly that we know perfection. What does it mean, then? Surely it is an experience charged, so to speak, with "spirit and life," full of stimulating, purifying hope. It implies that there are possibilities of perfection; that we shall not for ever groan and wring our hands over the failure of the

Digitized by Google

best that we know of somewhere and at some point to fill us full of all we want; that we shall not for ever live for unrealized ideals. This is why Christ says to us, not "Do this, and you will be good," but "Hope for this, and you will be perfect." Surely it is the greatest appeal, the appeal that treats us as being capable of infinite good. Let us cling to it with the strong intensity of men who have known the danger of ruin; who have seen the possibilities of the wreck, and of there being an infinite loss. If such be our case, let us cling to it, however sickening and self-depressing our own experience of what we are capable of has been; let us cling to it as a great hope, and insensibly it will purify us and bring us into a place of liberty. And let us cling to it, we who feel so acutely, so sorely sometimes, our own uselessness, that we are but a thing of paint and tinsel, that we see no opening and find no room to grow in—let us cling to this great hope that Christ brings so close to us in words awful, yet sweet, "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect."

So His words grow upon us; and as we grow, as it were, into them, they convince us that they are spirit and life—they give us not a theory of living, but life. And as the world grows older, and more tired of fresh expedients and new departures, it will,

Digitized by Google

I believe, find more and more to feed on in the words of Christ—more and more will the promise be realized, "Come unto Me, and ye shall find rest for your souls;" more and more will men, sick and weary of rules and formulas, find that it is Christ, and not Christianity, as it presents itself often in such draggled shapes, but Christ Himself Who can soothe and satisfy the needs of man; that rest in Him is the ultimate, the only real solution—rest that is not inactivity, nor vacuity, but that is that taking "His yoke and carrying His burden" which alone, according to His own most wondrous paradox, is the secret of finding rest in Him.

More and more we see that the rest He promises, the rest of a deep trust in Himself, His love, His goodness, His power—more and more we see how active a thing it is. The very rest of souls departed is, though a more complete repose in Him, not inconsistent with the highest activity; the rest here and now for souls weary of the world, the flesh, and the devil, is not helplessness and inactivity, but the "taking of Christ's yoke and carrying Christ's burden" in ministering to others.

II. And these considerations bring before us the one hope of reuniting divided Christian society. Not in mere compromises which satisfy no one, but in the deepening of considerations like these, there lies

Digitized by Google

the real hope of Christians again coming together—of the unity of the whole Christian family. We see divisions plainly enough in our midst; they are the despair of the evangelist, the cloud over the Church's path, the never-failing subject of the shallow cynic's sneer. How are they to be mended? Is it by saying they do not exist, by explaining away words and saying they mean nothing? Is it by accommodating the dogmatic statements of the Creed, so as to leave them boneless and nerveless pulp? Is it by the conception, which only could really occur to those who want to get rid of religion altogether, of holding all things in solution, abandoning any definite statements? Is it by members of the Church, who, if they believe anything, believe the Church to be the Body of Christ—a body, *i.e.* charged with supernatural power, saying that outward membership with her is a matter of no consequence? Is it (as has lately been suggested) by an interchange of pulpits? One fails to see in some cases, where all definite convictions have been abandoned, who could be the gainers by it, while often the only result must be that "the simple folk would go away ashamed," perplexed, and puzzled. Surely, brethren, such expedients, even if one can get one's self to believe in their honesty, and that they are not a new kind of advertisement, fail to convince one of their

Digitized by Google

usefulness. Surely the suspension of all definite convictions, even if one acknowledge that all man's reception of divine truth is but partial and limited, is a strange way of helping any real union of souls.

Here again Christ's words teach us the nature of real unity, "That they may be all one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee." Surely it is in the devotion of every life to the same Master; in the common hunger after righteousness; in the common craving for rest in Christ, by "wearing His yoke and bearing His burden;" in the sense of the One Father, of the Love and Compassion of the Son, of the indwelling energy of the consoling Spirit, that real union, which is a different thing from mere outward uniformity, is to be found. Surely it is not by the sacrifice of convictions, but by a greater effort to arrive at the inner heart of Christ's teaching, that men are preparing for this real union. To the end of time will men have their own way of assimilating Christian doctrines and of stating them; but to the end of time, as it has been from the beginning, every heart that has really loved and drawn near to Christ has drawn nearer to others, even unconsciously, because each have been doing justice to their own conception of truth. You see it not in the statements of men of different communions, but in the hymns they have written, in the prayers they have composed, and in

Digitized by Google

the lives they have lived; directly you get into the higher air, you see it must be so. Directly you get past the outworks of controversy into the regions of the inner life; the sore struggles with temptation, the purified wills, the disciplined affections, the enkindling aspirations have been the same in Churchmen and Methodists, Roman Catholics and Puritans, in those who have thought themselves as far apart as possible. They are one by the identity of their spiritual and moral life. And so, however far off outward unity may seem to recede, it will be more and more realized. As the presence of hostile systems is felt more and more, the best side of the Christian spirit will come forth, not to minimize nor to accommodate, nor to ignore honest differences, but to silence "the slanderer" who is separating God's servants; to cause men to drink deep and ever deeper into the spirit of Christ; to take His words and to find in them "spirit and life." Then we shall realize more what is meant by the Communion of saints. The barriers that separate us will no more need treating as obstacles to be violently jumped over; they will totter of themselves and fall, and the one flock shall be again in the sight of God and men, one flock under one Shepherd.

Digitized by Google

## *THE CHRISTIAN MOTIVE.*

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."—1 ST. JOHN iii. 2, 3.

IN considering Christ's words as "spirit and life," and the claim which their infinite depth makes on us for belief in Him, the question of the Christian motive as being higher or lower than the motives suggested by other moral teachers was necessarily passed over. Is it, then, true to say that the Christian motive is the highest; or is it merely one of self-interest, as it is often represented to be? That is one of those questions which every thoughtful man has to face sooner or later.

I. Let us remark, to begin with, that self-interest is a thing which no one likes to own to. There are very few men who will be pleased if you tell them that their simple motive of action is their own interest; they will immediately conjure up a thousand motives,

Digitized by Google

and quite sincerely believe themselves to be actuated by them, and then, perhaps, in the course of the same conversation they will proceed to speak of every one else as being obviously actuated by self-interest. Nothing is more extraordinary, in fact, if one were not so used to it, than the way in which men will speak of the world as if they did not belong to it—as if they held an elevated and unique position outside it, somewhere in space. For instance, while they repudiate the notion of any such motive actuating themselves, they will tell you, with a smile of conscious acumen, how entirely all the rest of their kind are actuated by self-interest. It is "the way of the world," they say, as if they had no part or lot in the matter; they assume an air of even grandfatherly benevolence while they hold up to you the frightful instances of self-seeking which are all around you. Queer and strange it is that we should be so fond of holding up our kind as being not "a little lower than the angels," but only a very little higher than the devils, yet such is the case; and more strange and more sad it is that so seldom does this low opinion of men seem to be a conviction which has been mournfully and after many struggles arrived at, but that really the wish seems to be father to the thought. Many still ask, "Who will show us any good?" and that not in the tones of men who desire

Digitized by Google

above all things to feast their eyes on some undiscovered beauty of character, but with the self-satisfied and cynical tone of men who have satisfied themselves by complete inquiry that no good is to be found. Some of us, in our more sour moments, have generalized in the same sweeping fashion, or have given in to it with a sigh when others have done so. It is no use arguing with that state of mind which is always proclaiming the selfishness of mankind. All you can say to it is, if these things are true—not granting it, but only supposing it—is there any good in saying them? Does it help to raise us out of our own selfishness if we feel that every one else is selfish; or does it not rather justify us in remaining in it? Does it kindle a new enthusiasm for goodness in us; or does it merely strengthen our tendencies to be tolerant to every sort of evil? Is it wise to cheapen the moral market?

To answer, to try to answer, these questions is good for us all, and it brings us back to the question of the Christian motive. Are we really right in assuming, as is so often done, that Christianity does so fall in with this common sweep of human tendency as to make what can be rightly called self-interest its prevailing motive? Are we really right in that sort of subconsciousness we indulge in when we hear of people making sacrifices, that they are ruled by



Digitized by Google

self-interest, or by the hope of material reward, or of something analogous to it? Is it, as those who attack us often say, simply a matter of mercenary enterprise? So much self-denial and so much strictness followed by so much reward, or so much self-indulgence and pleasure followed by so much punishment. Is that conception one we have a right to form and propagate?

II. The question indeed needs lifting out of the ordinary low level to which it has sunk. In a sense, no one can deny that the Gospel appeals to man's sense of interest, that it implies a system of rewards and punishments; but the real question is, "What are those rewards and punishments?" Is the reward one that can rightly be considered mercenary? Is not the distinction clouded over by the forgetfulness of the fact that, as in self there are two selves, the higher and the lower—two selves often wrestling, often struggling, two apparently contradictory tendencies—so in self-interest as a motive there are two kinds of it: one, that which seeks the interest of the higher self, the other, that which seeks the interest of the lower; the latter that seeks to attain something for self, the former that seeks for the highest development of self? Take two forms of expression which give life and concreteness to this idea. If it is said, "Every man has his price," we mean that a certain amount

Digitized by Google

of temptation to his lower self will buy any one, we express the pessimist view that every one is ruled ultimately by this lower self-interest, *i.e.* if we mean really what we say. But take another saying which seems at first sight to speak of self-interest, "Virtue is its own reward." We see at once that it is a different kind of self-interest we are speaking of; that if virtue is its own reward, and man pursues after virtue for that reason, it would be the height of absurdity to call his pursuit a mercenary one. Therefore there is self-interest, and self-interest as a motive—the interest, *i.e.*, of the higher and the lower self—and when we see that, we are in a better position to examine the Christian motive, and to see whether it can fairly be charged with being mercenary. Let us, at any rate, before we condemn the notion of the reward of heaven as conducing to self-seeking, try and see what is the heaven Christ came to reveal. I say which Christ came to reveal, for I am far from denying that men in His Name have often taught a mercenary heaven, and therefore I say, let us see what kind of a heaven Christ reveals, and if that can fairly be said to appeal to anything that we commonly call self-interest in the lower sense.

III. No doubt, then, Christ does put heaven before us as a reward, but it is a heaven, not of speculation or of imagination, but the heaven He Himself reveals

Digitized by Google

—the heaven He brought down in His own Person. He said, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest"—not come into a place, but "unto Me;" and again, "I and My Father are One, and he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

He showed them in His daily intercourse that all the lovely rules and laws He enforced were the expression of His own Nature. He told them He should leave them and go to the Father, and "in His Father's house were many mansions;" that "He would go to prepare a place, that where He was there they should be also." His Revelation, then, of heaven was companionship with Himself, life in Him and with Him, and life, too, like His life, governed by the same principles as the life He showed them.

Could they, then, ever think of heaven with any shade of a thought of merely getting for self, of ordinary self-interest attaining to it? "According to their view of Him would be their view of heaven."* To be with Him and like Him, they would say, is heaven. So they learned to understand His words and to hope for a treasure, to lay it up for hereafter, but the treasure was likeness to Christ, to be, like Him, perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect. And following this out, you find that you get very

* Ainger's Sermon II., to which I owe the main thought of this sermon.

Digitized by Google

little filling in of the main idea of heaven in the New Testament. The disciples longed, as every one has longed since, to know more about what heaven would be like, to have some definite and concrete thing to look forward to; but Christ told them very little, except that *companionship with Himself and rest in Him* was the essence of the matter; and as they grew to understand Him better they grew to desire this kind of heaven, "which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive," about which, *i.e.*, there is nothing that appeals merely to the wishes and desires of the natural man. It was a great hope, it was, to those who knew Him and had lived with Him, everything; but it was a hope that centred itself in character—on becoming like Him, and not on surroundings like Mohammed's Paradise or the Elysian fields.

And this leads me to say incidently a word about the influence of those lower conceptions of reward which appeal more directly to self-interest. People are often struck by seeing the indifference of Mohammedans in the face of death; soldiers have often told me how bravely they will go to death, and have argued that their religion must be more of a reality to them than ours. No doubt the lower, more mercenary conceptions of reward hereafter would make men more careless of their lives than the Christian

Digitized by Google

one of being with Christ. The certainty that he was to pass into a sensual paradise would cause a sensual man, perhaps, even to put an end to himself. But I have yet to learn that there is really anything great in absolute indifference to death. Whatever the relative value of this life and the next, this is certain, that this life has a value, that in it man has a work to do, that it is wrong to try to shorten it, and that, therefore, indifference to its sudden close is no real sign of greatness. That is one thing; another is that, even granting that lower conceptions do produce greater indifference and consequent carelessness in the face of death than the higher ones, at any rate, with the mass of mankind, yet we can never say, with the memory of Gordon and Havelock and a host of others before us, that the Christian conception, when realized, does not help men to die quite as bravely as any other conception, when there is any real and adequate reason.

Only let us once be clear what the Christian conception really is, and then when we are told that the Christian motive leads men into selfishness, we shall no doubt assent to this much—that it has often been so represented, but we shall be clear, too, that from the beginning in Christ's teaching and His Apostles' it was not so. It is not just to attribute to Christianity the caricatures which prejudice, or party spirit,

Digitized by Google

or a low conception of God have introduced into it. No doubt, under these influences, an idea of a heaven has often been invented which does seem to promise a reward to our lower self-interest, *e.g.* merely relief from responsibility and trouble. The popular notion of the dead being at rest in a kind of profound slumber is such a notion; so is the idea that heaven will be a deliverance from disagreeable and unrefined people. All those notions do seem to hold up self-interest as a motive, but Christ is in no way responsible for them, nor are His Apostles. St. John would not hold up a prolonged slumber or a deliverance from uncongenial society as a hope which would help a man to "purify himself, even as He is pure." By a test of that simple kind we see what a caricature of God's Revelation such conceptions are.

IV. And yet this, too, is clear enough, that this hope is meant to do something for us, and does do something. If it does not offer a reward in a lower sense that appeals to lower self-interest, it gives us a thought that will not leave us. We cannot, save by destroying our moral nature, cease to be convinced that we shall live again; we cannot help thinking of those fathers or children, brothers or wives, that are awaiting us. We must hope, unless, indeed, we only fear; we may no doubt forego the hope, but if we do we shall still be haunted by the fear. The love of

Digitized by Google

God, the desire for righteousness, the longing to be delivered from all that lowers and debases us now, these are the key to the appreciation of heaven. We may speculate on the nature of the place and its occupations, but we shall be no nearer understanding that which can only be spiritually discerned. Or we may cultivate curiosity till we bring ourselves to the state of mind reached by the great Frenchman, who, as death approached, said, "Now for the great secret;" but curiosity will not raise us to God's heights. God calls us to hope, to hope for the greatest, the most inconceivable of things, viz. that we shall be like Him. While, then, we repudiate with all our energy any conception of heaven as a mere reward whose essence consists in outward circumstances; while we say of such speculations as make the Christian motive seem to appeal to selfishness, that they are a caricature of Christ's teaching;—we cannot be thankful enough for a Revelation which gives us something to hope for, which really tells us so much about *ourselves* hereafter, while it tells us so little about our circumstances. "We know that we shall be like Him." There is a certainty which lifts us above any mere picturing of circumstances of ease, or of deliverance from trouble. "We know that we shall be like Him." There is the certainty that we crave for, there is the ground of our confidence, under the guidance of that

Digitized by Google

unerring compass, we can sail over the ocean of life. We are not carried hither and thither, this way to-day and that to-morrow, at the bidding of every guesser who speculates on the future. We do not change our opinions according to the last conversation we had, or the last sermon we heard, or the last book we read, or our own state of nerves and health. No spiritual freedom ever follows that kind of fluctuation. Many around us are feeling sick and tired of it; they have "run here and there for meat," and are still unsatisfied. The desire for repose, for rest, not for a sensual rest, but for rest for the spirit is the master yearning in every man's life. We want to be delivered from the falsehoods and from the delusions that possess us to-day only to leave us to morrow. We are tempted to try to find rest in some object short of the highest, and the more we try the more we feel how inadequate such things are, and therefore, even if we get them, there will be still that of which we are conscious, however dimly, the ultimate Power, the ultimate Righteousness, which is, and must be—whether we own it or not, whether we be reconciled to it or not—and which must remain. And so, while we weary ourselves with moral expedients and fresh speculations, and new departures, all the time the one real trouble remains. We are not at home with God, with the Power that rules, with the Righteousness

Digitized by Google

that satisfies. St. John comes to our aid with a great promise and a great hope and a clear conception. He does not say, "Go on hunting about till you find something to satisfy you about the hereafter amid the speculations and dreams of men;" nor does he say, "Do the best you can, and you shall know some day;" nor does he say, "Whatever you suffer now shall be made up to you hereafter, therefore suffer as much as you can"—none of these. But he says, "Take a great hope as your sheet-anchor. 'We know that we shall be like Him'—like the ideal Righteousness, like Him Whose Glory we have seen. Take this great hope, build on it, live for it, let it flow into you, and this hope shall make you pure, this hope shall deliver you even now from the torment of self, this hope shall even now give you rest amid surrounding storms, for it joins you with Him Who is and reigns and loves."

Digitized by Google

## *LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE.*

"Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth."—1 Cor. viii. 1.

We are all familiar with St. Paul's great and matchless description of the virtue of charity—a description so powerful that the very words under which it is conveyed linger in our ears like some lovely piece of melody. It is well we have so elevated a description to turn to as the corrective for the thin and miserable meanings which our common use of language often gives to so great a word. Charity too often means with us the disposition to utter amiable commonplaces, or to give shillings where, perhaps, we ought to give sovereigns, or perhaps to give nothing —only to decide that question would give us more trouble, and would make greater demands on our charity than we care to make. Charity, in St. Paul's view, is the highest of Christian graces and virtues—the grace whereby we know and love God and love our brother man in Him, after the fashion in which we have learnt that our Father loves us, counting no

Digitized by Google

sacrifice too burdensome to be borne, no trouble too heavy to be taken. Charity is the power of loving in the Divine way, the highest grace God's Holy Spirit pours into man. It is that which makes man most like God, and so it supplies the strongest force man can exercise. The great gifts of wisdom and knowledge and imaginative power, the great virtues of self-control and self-determination, great as they are, are all secondary to it, not only in fact, but in power. Everything else fails at some point, but this Divine way of loving, never; the insight of faith, the courage of hope, yield to it the precedence. It, and it only and alone, "never faileth"; there are no bounds to its possibilities either of growth or of achievement.

It is with this power of loving in the Divine way which we call charity that knowledge is contrasted in the text, and at first sight it seems as if the claims of knowledge were somewhat harshly and grudgingly recognized. Taken baldly and by themselves, we might be listening to the words of some obscurantist trying to maintain a hopeless struggle against the advance of the flowing tide of knowledge by pointing to one of its possible, though not necessary consequences. We might be listening to one of those modern opponents of education who tell us that education is the root of all evil, in that it puts notions into the minds of young people that unfit them for

Digitized by Google

their station in life, and which would reserve cultivation as the special and peculiar property of the prosperous classes. But you have only to look a little more closely at the argument which St. Paul is developing to see that he is by no means lending the support of his great authority to such narrow conclusions. The knowledge he is speaking of is not knowledge in general, but the knowledge which enabled a man to see that, as an idol was nothing, therefore no defilement could be experienced by eating meat that had been offered to idols. This knowledge, which his converts had, placed them on a different level from the surrounding heathen; but that taken by itself, he reminds them, might do them nothing but harm; it might puff them up, it might merely make them conceited. They needed a stronger force to supplement this mere knowing more than others. They needed charity which edifieth, which buildeth up instead of puffing up, which developeth, makes full, *i.e.* rather than empty. These Corinthian converts were, in fact, in the danger that is always a recurring one—the danger of supposing that knowledge by itself was a sufficient guide of human life. The question before them was one of those mixed questions which touch human life at many points, and which therefore require something much more powerful than the mere knowledge of that of which others are

Digitized by Google

ignorant to settle. They demand always a spirit of charity, for the scruples and difficulties of human nature have to be considered. Mere knowledge that those scruples are unfounded will not help you very far. You want insight as well; and it is love that loves in a Divine way that gives insight, and this insight shows you that you cannot approach your brother to teach him out of your superior wisdom until you have learnt to step down to his level and to bear the burden of his scruples and his difficulties. It is impossible not to stop here and to say, "Would to God that all religious teachers who have tried to carry on St. Paul's work had been animated by this spirit!" In the revolts against Christianity that have hindered its course, how many have been, not against the "faith once delivered to the saints," but against spiritual intolerance, against the overbearingness of mere knowledge that puffeth up, against the spirit that has found the formulas of the creeds too simple and has erected pious opinions into articles of faith? How deeply the cause of Christ has suffered by being identified with such a spirit, those who have read Church history know only too well. God only grant that we, who have to repair so many waste places which this spirit has caused, and to recover so much ground which it has lost, may rid ourselves of its contamination, and resist manfully its perpetual solici-

Digitized by Google

tations. It is so easy to adopt a tone of superior wisdom, and treat the shibboleths of a party as though they were the essence of the Christian religion; so easy in some way or other to exhibit the knowledge that puffeth up, that is vain, wordy, and empty, rather than the charity which buildeth up, the power of loving in the Divine way which developeth.

Knowledge, then, by itself, unbalanced, has its dangers. It puffeth up; it tends to one-sided growths which are not real developments. It is not able by itself to settle any question where human nature comes in. Are we, then, we Christians who see this, to join in a Philistine crusade against the advance of knowledge, the spread of education? Are we to try to check the rising tide, the growing thirst to know, because we see that knowledge will not do everything? Surely it were the most short-sighted as well as the most wicked of attempts. We could not check the advance of knowledge if we would, and we would not if we could. If we are wise in our generations, we shall recognize ungrudgingly, and rejoice in the fact, that God has made, through scientific discovery, fresh revelations of Himself; that He in His unutterable condescension has enabled us to know Him better and to love Him more through the patient researches of scientific men like Darwin. If we are wise on another side of the

Digitized by Google

subject, we shall rejoice that, whereas fifty years ago only the Church of England and the founders of British schools cared much for education, and made sacrifices for it, now the State itself cares; and the danger is, not that children should not have an elementary education, but that men should think that a merely elementary education will develop their whole character on every side. The danger now is, not that children should grow up unable to read and write, but that we should look to such an education as is given in our elementary schools to do what it never will do—that is, cure root-evils. Knowledge may lift men above gross vices, but vice that has lost its grossness is still vice. Even a knowledge of the history of morals that enables us to draw the line ever so accurately between virtue and vice, will not make us of necessity severely moral. Knowledge needs supplementing; that is what, if I mistake not, we have to testify to. Knowledge will never do all it can for human nature until it is supplemented. It may give us width of view and increase of mental power, but it will not set us above the need of defences which less cultivated men require. Many a shipwreck has followed the forgetfulness of this elementary fact. The sands of time are strewn with the carcases of those who thought that their superior knowledge raised them above the common

Digitized by Google

conditions of the race and above the need of deliverance from evil; and men, like Byron, who might have been a power and a source of elevation in the world, have gone hence and left behind them nothing but the painful remembrance of great gifts abused; or at least stained by the tarnish of a life that on the whole did mischief. Knowledge, again, may only puff us up, so as to hide from us the plainest duties beneath our feet. It is only with love that knowledge becomes safe becomes a living power.

Such considerations are highly necessary in the presence of a certain stratum of modern thought, which speaks of education as the deliverance from all evils; which goes on repeating the maxim that "knowledge is power," without ever giving a moment to considering the fact that it may be power for evil. "You taught me language," says Caliban to his master, in the "Tempest," "and my profit on it is I know how to curse." Cultivation creates new powers; it also creates new dangers. It lessens, no doubt, the hold of certain temptations, but it leads men into new ones. It may raise men above the attractions of the beershop and the gin-palace, above the attractions of low, criminal literature; but there are sensual pleasures of quite as cruel and as gross a nature, that it will not touch.



Digitized by Google

We have only to look at our own great city to see the truth of this. We are in a position now to judge of the effect of the Education Act of 1870, on the class with which it dealt. It was to do great things—to effect everything, in the expectation of some of its advocates. The beerhouse was to cease to tempt; increased cultivation was to drive out the old and low tastes. And it has done much. But who that walks down one of our popular thoroughfares on a Sunday evening, and sees the reckless, indecent behaviour of the lads and girls of the class who have just emerged some three or four years from our board schools, will dare to say that it has done what it was expected to do? Not that I would for one moment seek to throw blame on the individuals who administer a system for which they are not responsible, and whose personal influence does much to mitigate the manifest defects of that system. Undoubtedly a great deal of blame belongs to that system. Any mechanical system like the code leaves few direct opportunities to teachers; and that they do really good work by their influence as well as by such education as is possible within the prescribed limits, I should be the first to recognize. The result is, in many cases, excellent; but, looking at the classes as a whole reached by the Education Act, what can we say? The class is less dangerous

Digitized by Google

to society, no doubt; but can we think it is purer and better in the sight of God? Dare we say that the moral tone is better? And surely evil is not less evil because it has parted with its grossness? From a moral point of view, education, *i.e.* mere increase of knowledge, does two things chiefly: (1) It acts as a deterrent just so far as it is made interesting enough to arouse the mental faculties, and to arrest and cultivate the imagination. All of us probably know the protection against evil thoughts which some absorbing book will give us, and just in that way education acts as a deterrent and occupies the ground beforehand. And (2) it removes the recipient from one stratum of temptation to another; it raises him above vice; it lessens the hold of certain grave temptations, but it continually brings him into the presence of new ones. This last fact was what pious and timid men saw, and they cried out, "Don't educate, because of its dangers." They could see nothing but dangers. The gracious influences which pass from teachers to taught, and which often result in such life-shaping motives, were hid from them. But a truer and more Divine instinct governed the minds of the pioneers of education. They felt for the poor men; they felt that, at least, they could not leave them ignorant as beasts, but would try to raise them to a plane whence aspiration is possible, and that,

Digitized by Google

at least if they could not secure that they should aspire, they would not therefore, leave them in hopeless degradation, with perchance a mighty wealth of power left to "fust in them unused." This was their view, and it was a complete one as far as it went. But none the less ought it to have looked into the question more thoroughly. There is a way—the only way—of safe-guarding education and increased knowledge: to cultivate the moral sense; to train children in the love and service of the All-Father; to give them with increased mental expansion, at any rate, an opportunity of knowing "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, to think on these things;" to train them in that hardest thing, the government of the thoughts. There is a way of making education the highest blessing by teaching them to distinguish the relative value of things, between what is good and permanent, and what is evil and passeth away, and that can be done only by religious teaching that is definite and yet adapted to a child's mind. And if ever we are to escape from the dangers attending secular knowledge, it will be by definite religious teaching, teaching of the same clear kind as is given on

Digitized by Google

geography and science in our elementary schools. And however much for a time the jealousy of sects, and the narrowness and dogmatism on secondary matters of some who have spoken on the Church's side, the suspicion of spiritual body-snatching or proselytizing that has been engendered on the one side and the other, may have contributed to hinder the recognition of this, yet I venture to say, if from no other reasons, yet from the failure of all other systems, we shall come to this. It will be seen that the Love of God is the highest education, and that you cannot love an abstraction, a Being about whom you read in a book; you can only love the Father revealed in the Son. It will be seen that the worship and service of Him are the best humanizers, refiners, and developers of the mind and heart. The Bible is the educational influence which has had most to do in forming all that is best and greatest in the English character. Men are beginning to see it. No one saw this more clearly or expressed it more eloquently than that great master of literature * who has just gone to his rest, and whose services to the cause of education we may at least gratefully remember here, however much we may regret the results of some of his incursions into the region of theology. He was as sensible of the fact as any of

* Matthew Arnold.

Digitized by Google

us, that to thousands the Bible has been their one true culture; that they have found in it their history, their poetry, and their philosophy; that through its influence education has taken its firmest hold on them, because it has connected itself with their life and soul, their needs and aspirations. Now, the Creeds of the Church are of inestimable value in enabling a child to find its way in the Bible, to realize its meaning. If we are to teach religion effectually, we must use the Apostles' Creed. It is as necessary as the groundwork of religious teaching as the multiplication table is for the teaching of arithmetic.

It is because of the great and wide-reaching contribution made by this College* to the cause of religious education that I have ventured to speak on this subject to-day. No one can over-estimate the value of the work of these training colleges. In a period like this they have been, in a true and real sense, "schools of the prophets." Out of them have gone men who have done the greatest work in the elementary schools of the country; who have been centres of a very widespread influence for good, because they have gained not merely the knowledge which might have puffed up, but the charity, the love of God and of men, and, above all, the love of children, which undoubtedly edifieth. My own work

* St. Mark's College, Chelsea.

Digitized by Google

has brought me into contact with many former students of this college, and I can say most truly that they carry into their work the happiest results of their training here. It will be an evil day for the interests of definite religious teaching (and by that I do not mean foolish and wasted attempts at proselytism, but the kind of religious teaching which a man who has learnt the inner meaning and spirit of formularies will always be able to give, even when he cannot use the formularies themselves as a basis)—it will be an evil day for the highest moral and spiritual interests of children if colleges such as these cease to be supported, as they ought to be, by the whole strength of the Church of England. It is no question at all now of attaching children to this or that denomination; it is a question whether we shall continue to give that definite religious instruction which alone can give life-shaping motives, and reach the hearts of little children. Thus, and thus only, shall we escape the dangers of the advance of knowledge, the growth of that sciolistic spirit which, because it knows a few things more or less imperfectly, thinks itself in a position to look down on others, and knows not how spiritually poor and naked and blind and miserable it is. And on the whole question, it ought to be pressed upon Churchmen that if the Church of England is to preserve her

Digitized by Google

position in this country, we must make a determined stand to maintain our Voluntary Schools, to bring them into that high state of mechanical efficiency which the Board Schools reach, and, above all, to give in them that higher education of the heart and the will and the conscience that comes through the more complete knowledge of God. Nothing can or ought to eclipse this duty. If we are to escape the perilous tendencies of the advance of knowledge, it will only be by preserving the religious element, and by trusting to the power of the Christian influence, the charity that buildeth up and developeth. No subsequent efforts in guilds or classes or institutes can compensate for that loss of touch, of sympathetic interest at the most impressionable time of life, which will surely follow the closing of our Church schools. No desire for more comely and magnificent services, no architectural adornment, ought to tempt us in any parish to divert subscriptions from our schools. No surrender in any parish is so fraught with disaster as the surrender of schools. Better give up even attempts at relief than surrender that close opportunity possessed by those of the clergy who are at home in their schools, of touching and influencing those on whom the cold clammy hand of indifference, or the absorption of the cares of this world has not yet passed. I did not always think this. I came

Digitized by Google

to see it gradually, and nothing made me see it so much as my work on the School Board. And much as I admire and appreciate the excellent work done in those schools, yet even there one sees that the excellence of that work, as far at any rate as the religious teaching goes, is attributable very much,—how much no one can say—to the existence of Institutions like this.

And one word may I venture to say, in conclusion, to the students of this college. Yours is a great calling. No one, not even a clergyman, has greater opportunity for influence than a schoolmaster. It is what he *is* that tells so; what he is in his inmost self. What a power he is if he is not only manly, self-controlled, and patient—that is most important—but sympathetic, earnest-minded, a lover of good, a follower of Christ. It is not strength of opinions, or good intentions, or party views, but it is character that tells everywhere, and, above all, a formed character tells amid the unformed and plastic beings that sit at the desks in our elementary schools. And yet you can and will effect nothing real and lasting, however brilliantly you may succeed in outward matters—you can be and will be nothing unless you make yourself ready in this place. "Covet earnestly the best gifts;" use your opportunities of cultivation; learn all you can; be ambitious; "but

Digitized by Google

yet show I unto you a more excellent way"—"Follow after charity;" strive to gain that root-virtue which is the greatest grace—the Love of God, the Love of Christ, and the Love of the Holy Spirit. Strive on your knees at that Altar, and in quiet moments in this place; "follow after charity," and there will flow from you and through you, over all with whom you come in contact, a love and a sympathy which will not only be the happiness and spring of your own life, but will, in the driest tasks, make you the highest thing a man can be—a fellow-worker with God.

Digitized by Google

## *THE BANE OF LITERALISM.*

"The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."—2 Cor. iii. 6.

We have been reading, in this morning's first lesson, the account of a deed of very cruel treachery—a deed that we feel at once, even in that savage age, was utterly indefensible,—the slaying of Sisera by Jael. There can be no excuse for Jael's action. She had no personal, no national wrongs to avenge; she did not belong to an oppressed race; "there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and Heber her husband." Sisera fled to Jael's tent as a place of sure refuge. She bade him welcome; he trusted her, and then she proceeded to murder him.

Then we shall read to-night Deborah's magnificent song of triumph, in which she asserts that Jael's act and Jael's self were blessed, and contrasts in scathing language her conduct with the cowardice of those tribes who preferred their own comfort to sharing their country's danger.

Now, the question is a very natural one, especially

Digitized by Google

in reference to questions which we have recently been considering, What are we to think of all this? Here is a very cruel, savage, treacherous action—an action which even the ethics of barbarian tribes would condemn; an action manifestly opposed to our instinctive sense of right and goodness—and we find Deborah, who is said to be a prophetess of the Lord, praising that action in a lyric ode of great beauty and power. The question to get clear, to pull out and look straight at, is, Are we to think that God approved of Jael's action, and that the Holy Spirit inspired Deborah's hymn? Are we to think that He, Whose essential characteristics are righteousness, love, and truth, could accommodate Himself to and bless the savage impulses and unholy passions which characterize these proceedings? I am afraid that a great many people are so wedded to a certain dull unimaginative way of reading the Bible that they would answer, Yes. The Bible has suffered more than any other book, not only from literalism, but from the habit of importing into the text far more than it actually contains; and this is a signal instance of the misfortune attendant on such a course. Because Deborah is said to be a prophetess, therefore it is assumed rashly and hastily that every word she uttered, all her bitter cursing and ruthless charges, were inspired by God and have a Divine

Digitized by Google

sanction. Again and again those who have been, as they think, fighting God's battles, have learnt to curse bitterly those who, like the inhabitants of Meroz, "came not to the help of the Lord," and have assumed they were re-echoing the Divine voice. But the conception is totally unwarranted and unwarrantable. How could God, the Holy, the Just, sanction that from which even our imperfect goodness revolts? It is quite true that God is always and everywhere on the side of the oppressed, and that Israel was oppressed at this time; but we have no right, we are doing Him a wrong if we suppose that He would sanction cruel treachery even to undo oppression. And yet men have been found who have tried to twist this deed into some kind of harmony with Christian ethics, tried by lame attempts, and only succeeded in giving a triumph to the sceptic and perplexity to simple-minded yet honest believers. The cause of the misconception lies in the meaning we have imported into the word "prophetess." If Deborah was not said to be a prophetess, no one would suppose her war-song to be inspired. Let us look, then, at this question first. What the prophetic gift in the old time actually was, what were its limits, it is extremely difficult to define with any accuracy; but that to be a prophet meant to be always and completely inspired by God is unquestionably an utterly exaggerated idea. Our

Digitized by Google

own conception of the gift of prophecy is usually somewhat confined to the idea of prediction—we think of the prophets as foretelling; but, as a matter of fact, the title "prophet" answers very much to the highest idea represented by the title "preacher," *i.e.* one who interprets and adapts the highest truth to each generation. Isaiah was as much a prophet in his description of the daughters of Zion and their mincing follies, or of the Church of his day as being like a barren vineyard, or when he pronounced woes on those who add "field to field till no place for the poor to dwell in remains," as when he drew the sublime picture of Him Who should "bear our sins and carry our sorrows." Prophecy is the telling forth of God's truth to every generation, and only incidentally the telling things to come. The schools of the prophets were training colleges for religious teachers, not places where men were taught to predict the future.

Even when we get rid of this misconception, there remains another behind, viz. that all the utterances of all the prophets are necessarily inspired, are God's words. Now, of course, in one sense every perfect gift comes from above, and the gift of prophecy in the sense of proclamation among them. But St. Paul specially guards the Corinthians against confounding the words of one who had found grace to be faithful

Digitized by Google

with the absolute commandments of the Lord; he disclaims for himself infallibility. So that one has no reason to think that this or that utterance of Deborah was inspired. In the case before us there is every reason to see that it was not so; that it was the utterance of a Hebrew woman of fierce spirit and of undaunted courage, chanting a war-song in the first flush of victory, feeling that twenty years of cruel triumphant oppression had been revenged, seeing the oppressor laid low. Read thus, it is a very natural outburst of poetic fervour, the war-song of a true patriot, and this is all we need take it to be. That gift of poetic song she certainly had, and, so far, like Miriam in days before, she was a prophetess; but there is no proof that she had the gift of prediction or that utterance of God's special message to her generation, which were among the higher gifts of the prophets. Her prophetic gift was rather "an afflatus of poetic inspiration" * than anything else. This subordinate gift she degrades by some of the sentiments of her song, and only a bald literalism could hide the truth by making the Holy Spirit responsible for her utterances. And therefore we must judge her words by the same standard of right and wrong by which we judge the utterances of other men of that time; but we

* Bishop Fraser's "University Sermons," p. 141.

Digitized by Google

must not think that, because the Bible is a faithful recorder of the history of God's people, of their struggles and difficulties, as well as of their triumphs, that we are to twist our moral sense in trying to reconcile with absolute righteousness all their conduct in those struggles, or in trying to prove that all the wild utterances, even of those who, like Samson, in some other ways may have represented God, declared His true Mind and Will.

Now, an incident, such as this, is extremely useful, if it induces us to appreciate the greatness of the contrast between the revelation to Israel and the revelation made to us in Christ. As a rule, I fear, even devout Churchmen are little alive to the darkness and obscurity which characterizes much of the Old Testament revelation. And that darkness and obscurity is deepened by insisting on reading the Divine into the purely human, by failing to grasp the progress of revelation. The books of Moses and writings of Solomon are bound up in one volume with Gospels and Epistles, and we treat them all as though they were a single book instead of a library. It is a habit—a most unscientific one, but one which can quote great names in its defence—to try to prove Christian doctrines from the Old as well as the New Testament Scriptures. We who look back and read the events of the New Testament into the language of the Old

Digitized by Google

are often not impressed by the vast difference, the spiritual chasm, which separates the two. We cannot put ourselves into the place of those of old—we cannot realize the truth of Christ's own utterance that the weakest and meanest in the Christian Church is greater than John the Baptist, though John was as great as any of the prophets. A want of historical consciousness has almost obscured the real meaning of the Old Testament; it has almost lost sight of the gradual and very slow emergence of Israel from barbarism, and their long and difficult training in the one great truth of Monotheism. We have read into the Old Testament a morality of which its writers could have known nothing, the same morality that breathes through the Sermon on the Mount, and then we have resorted to all kinds of artifices and accommodations (to the disgust of plain and honest men) in order to justify inhuman acts, and to make God responsible for the deceit of Jacob and for the cruel treachery of Jael.

It all arises from a failure to put ourselves in the places of those to whom light first came—to measure the interval, as they felt it, between the light and the darkness. To them "old things had passed away, all things became new," when at last the Life of God found expression in the life of man, and the Kingdom of heaven was established upon earth. Men were



Digitized by Google

born again, and felt that they were; they belonged to a new race, they had been made "partakers of the Divine Nature." We are so familiarized with this that we scarcely realize the abyss that separates them from those who "sat in darkness and in the shadow of death." On the other hand, while we protest against drawing inferences about what God approves or disproves from all Old Testament stories, we must not let ourselves think that God only began to reveal Himself when Christ came. His ways were shown in the government of Israel, in the way that He trained them by promises, by awful chastisements. We may get these things out of proportion, of course, but if we study them carefully, they do reveal the Character of God; they have an indestructible interest, they were "written for our learning." The only thing we must remember is, that the revelation to the Jews was rudimentary.

I want to press this upon you in relation to one special point, because it is so frequently misconceived and misrepresented in the present day, and that is in reference to the letter of the Ten Commandments. Often and often, in all sorts of references, in political addresses when it is convenient, and in economical discussions, we have the Ten Commandments quoted as though they were the Divine last word on the subject of Christian morality as to our duty and

Digitized by Google

practice. Now, what wants to be said quite clearly is, that no one has a right to call himself a Christian who says that the Ten Commandments in their literal meaning are enough for him. God has given in Christ an explanation of the Ten Commandments which carries them back from their literal meaning to their inward spirit. That inward spirit He has defined and formulated in two great ways, as regards Himself and as regards others. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God;" "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." There is the whole meaning of the Ten Commandments in those two—their innermost and essential meaning. And very often the letter of the Ten Commandments may be, often is, pressed in such a fashion as to contradict and destroy that innermost and essential meaning. A man may insist on the most literal observance of the bare letter of the Ten Commandments, in a way which utterly and entirely contradicts their spirit. Certainly this has been done by some who have supported the most cruel and barbarous proceedings at some recent evictions, on the ground that the rights of property are sacred.

This is worth thinking about always, and especially now. We must be beware of two opposite mistakes in dealing with the Ten Commandments, in the face of two contrary currents of thought. On

Digitized by Google

the one hand, we can never become so advanced as to dispense with them. We believe God has made far nobler revelations of Himself, and has given precepts requiring a loftier perfection than the Ten Commandments.* But if we fail to keep the laws which were adapted to a nation on the verge of barbarism, how can we do anything but grievously fail to keep the higher laws of the Sermon on the Mount? The Ten Commandments are a first lesson in morals which we cannot skip or look askance at—they can never be obsolete; they are God's earliest revelation of Himself; they record morally what He hates and abhors; they are chiefly prohibitions, but they teach us fundamental lessons; there is no casting them overboard without infinite peril. On the other hand, remember they are first lessons on the claims of God given to a barbarous people, who had been corrupted for generations by contact with the vices of a great heathen country, and whose religion had been tainted with superstition and idolatry. You must read them in reference to the then state of Israel, to the then possibilities of the world, if you would understand them. You must remember, too, that when God gave them He meant them to be kept, not fitfully, but always, and He would not put too hard a burden on the men of those early times.

* Cf. R. W. Dale on the Ten Commandments.

Digitized by Google

They were not meant to bring them to a sense of guilt, or to suggest sins, but to rule their lives. The people were not to worship false gods or graven images, not to work on sabbaths, not to commit murder or adultery. God meant them to obey, not to disobey and then be sorry, but to obey them. That is an important consideration. If they were meant to be kept, it would not do to make them too hard. I once heard of a society which had "rules to be aimed at," but the closest analysis failed to detect in the conduct of its members any appearance of such an aim as could be by the utmost charity supposed to be likely to hit the mark. The Ten Commandments were not rules to be aimed at, but Commandments to be obeyed. Directly, then, on the one hand, you begin to say, "They are obsolete; I need not give them a thought. Christ has given us the new law of love," you are in danger. On the other hand, directly you begin to think, "These rules are all I need keep. I do not worship idols, commit adultery or murder, therefore I am a good man," you are in danger too. There they stand, God's great primal claim upon man in a barbarous state, but the foundation of the wider and deeper claims of the future. The letter of them now killeth, *i.e.* hides their essential meaning. We have no disposition to worship idols, or, at any rate, external idols, and we

Digitized by Google

have no sabbath to keep; but the second and fourth commandments have developed into two great principles which ought to govern our worship of God and our use of time. These great principles are, (1) that we worship God in spirit and in truth, as spiritual beings with the consciousness of meeting a Spiritual Being, with profound self-abasement, but with utter and childlike trust; and (2) that we use all our time, week-days and Sundays, as a trust, bearing in mind the admirable exposition of the Catechism, which in answer to the question, What do you learn from the fourth commandment, tells you to say, "I learn that I should serve Him truly all the days of my life." But we can all see how possible it is by literalism to defeat the spirit and meaning of both these commandments. The words "That we should serve Him truly all the days of our life," cover a much larger moral claim than any sabbath or Sunday observance could represent. To "worship Him in spirit and in truth" is a much more searching precept than merely to refrain from worshipping idols. We cannot limit God's moral claim upon us by obeying the letter of His earlier and confessedly fragmentary statements of that claim.

Lastly, I would say a word or two on the general question of literalism in connection with the subject of inspiration. The Bible is God's Word; "holy men

Digitized by Google

spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." But it is also most truly man's word. God did not speak through men as if they were "hollow-sounding masks," like the oracles of Delphi. He spoke in the hearts and souls of men, and the message of God took human colouring from those hearts and souls. So they spoke under the limitations and conditions of their day and generation; their writings were influenced by the philosophy and scientific knowledge of their day; they spoke its "history and science just as they spoke its dialects and its grammar." * They thought that the sun went round the earth, and they said so; it would have been not supernatural, but contra-natural, if they had not. God used human hearts, human thoughts, human knowledge, human character, so that His message might reach men.

This is to treat the Bible in the true way, to cherish its life-giving spirit. How has it been treated? Literalism has simply killed God's Word. It has claimed that every word, every accent is inspired. Religious persons have trembled at the feeblest criticism on it; assemblies of good people have shuddered at the idea that this passage was not

* See "The Bible, Human and yet Divine," Sermon XV., in "The Gospel and the Age," by the Bishop of Peterborough, in which the whole subject is most ably and lucidly worked out.

Digitized by Google

accurate history, and the other was not true science; we have had some most dishonest explanations, some most far-fetched reconciliations, some most ingenious hypotheses—a whole paraphernalia of spiritual jugglery invoked to get rid of plain facts.

Why need they have done it? What is the good? Why not say boldly, "Just as the Master was most truly human, most truly Divine, so the Word is truly human and truly Divine." The Bible is what God meant it to be, and not what we think He ought to have meant it to be. It is a book with a life-giving spirit underlying it, and mere criticism of its words and its historical ideas only hides that life-giving spirit from you.

How shall we prove the inspiration of the Bible? How shall we prove it to be the Word of God? Not by making claims it never makes for itself, not by ignoring the mistakes in it that arise from the limitations under which it was written, but by laying our hearts bare to its influence, by making it the rule of life in sorrow and weakness, and trial and temptation. So we shall find that it reaches us as no merely human word ever could. So we shall gain from it a light on our path in this tangled wilderness of temptation and sin; so we shall find it in no forced fashion, but in the light of its own revealing, God's very own Word to our inmost selves.

Digitized by Google

## *SUNDAY.*

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it."—ROM. xiv. 5, 6.

ONE of the most remarkable instances in the New Testament of the triumph of the spirit over the letter as illustrated in human character is to be found in St. Paul's treatment of the question of the Jewish Sabbath. In a time of transition like that in which he wrote, perpetual difficulties and constant questions about the consciences of weak brethren were sure to arise. The Jews who became Christians continued their religious practices, among which was the observance of the Sabbath. Who that knows the value of such a habit could have wished them to do otherwise? The day and its observance meant to them a great deal—a great deal from association, a great deal as a welcome recurrence of physical rest. It was a religious institution of great value to them. St. Paul

Digitized by Google

recognizes their perfect right and even duty to keep it—"He that regardeth the day regardeth it unto the Lord;" but he resists, with a firmness which at times rises almost to passion, any attempt to induce the Gentile converts to keep the Sabbath as a matter of religious obligation. About this he was as clear as about the other. "He that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

It is quite clear that the early Christians who were not Jewish converts did not keep the Sabbath as a religious duty, nor is there any shadow of evidence in St. Paul's writings, or in any New Testament writer, that goes to support the theory that the early Christians transferred the customary observance of the seventh day to the first day. There is very much that tells the other way. The one only thing that St. Paul assumes about the first day of the week is that Christians would meet on it for worship, and that is the only practice we find associated with Sunday. Nor is there any positive command about that. If a man says to me, "Where in the New Testament is the command to go to Church on Sunday?" it is hard to point it out. There are some words about almsgiving as a part of Sunday worship. There are some severe words in the Epistle to the Hebrews about "those who forsake the assembling of themselves together;"

Digitized by Google

but the assembly for worship was rather, I imagine, regarded as a matter of Christian instinct, a privilege which no one would forego willingly, than as a matter of Divine commandment. As Christ had cleansed and sanctified all things, so that nothing was especially clean; as He had proclaimed God as the Father of all, so that there were no peculiar people, so that there was neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, nor Scythian;—so He had taught that God had sanctified all time. Men might make their own rules as they chose. "One man esteemed every day alike, another esteemed one day above another;" but there was clearly no formulated observance of Sunday or any other day.

Moreover, any general observance of Sunday, in the way of rest, under the Roman Empire would have been impossible until the time of Constantine. The Law Courts were open; the traders did their business on the first day as well as on any other. By the time of Constantine the Jewish Sabbath ceased to be observed, and a craving for a weekly rest became so general that the Emperor was able to promulgate a decree requiring the closing of the Courts of Law and the suspension of all work on Sunday. But that there was any superior sanctity about Sunday, anything which made it like Good Friday, any special rules about its observance beyond the fact that the

Digitized by Google

worship of God, which was felt to be a primary duty, cast its light over the day—and the weekly rest, felt to be an untold blessing, marked it as a day of great relief and liberty—is an idea unknown to times before the reign of Charlemagne. The institution of Sunday was not in the nature of a law to be obeyed, like the law of the Sabbath. Sunday was a free gift of God, to be enjoyed—something which Christ secured for His Church by the special honour which He paid to the first day of the week by rising from the dead and sending the Holy Spirit on that day; something which God had given to His people in this toiling world; something which people were glad of. No coercion, legal or moral, was required to compel them to keep Sunday. It was gratefully received by men as a gift of God. So the Church of England treats it in her authorized utterances. Of all the Christian bodies the Church of England has the least to say about the method of observing Sunday.* Some of us are accustomed to reflect with much asperity on the laxity of the Roman Catholics in respect of Sunday, but it ought to be said that, as regards any written rule, the Roman Catholic Church is much stricter than the Church of England. She obliges her members to hear Mass; she forbids them to do servile work. But

* Some of these thoughts were suggested to me by a thoughtful article which appeared in the *Spectator* in the present spring.

Digitized by Google

our Prayer-book's only direction about Sunday is that it is "to be observed." There is no word about how it is to be observed, and no separation from other days. It shares the distinction of being "observed" with days so universally devoted to secular rejoicing, as Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas Day. Moreover, the Prayer-book contains a most precise and excellent Christian paraphrase of the Ten Commandments, of their spirit as transformed by the Christian law of love—a statement from which nothing is left out which is of importance, for it is a statement to be used in the complete instruction of her members. When we look at the treatment there of the fourth commandment, we are astonished at its width and its absence of definiteness. The third commandment is expanded into this, "My duty is to honour God's Holy Name and His Word." Nothing would have been more easy, more natural, more in accordance with traditional views than to have expanded the statement of the fourth commandment into "My duty is to honour God's Holy Day." But there is nothing of the sort in the explanation of the Catechism. Its answer to the question, "What dost thou learn from the fourth commandment?" is "To serve God truly all the days of my life." Of course, you must take that statement in connection with the fact before stated, that Sunday is to be "observed;"

Digitized by Google

but even then this is the fourth commandment with the meaning assigned to it by the Church of England, though it is certainly not the fourth commandment of a great many of her Ministers.

There are abundant evidences of the survival of the "letter that killeth" in almost every treatise or discussion on the subject. The most ingenious efforts are made to prove the bindingness of the fourth commandment, to mix up Sunday with the Jewish Sabbath, and thereby there is missed all the real honour and greatness of Sunday. Men are taught to think, not of the great privileges of celebrating the Day of Days, but of the penalties of disobedience to a law which they know to be abrogated, and a law, too, which it is sought to enforce in the most wearisome and absurd ways by the most ludicrous of prohibitions and distinctions. There is, *e.g.*, a distinction drawn in some quarters between Sunday and week-day tunes. You may join in the irreverent trivialities of Moody and Sankey's hymns, but those matchless creations of a great genius, the Overture to Tannhaüser or the Song of the Rhine Maidens, are, forsooth, secular, not fit for Sunday. You may walk or run on Sunday along a road in a tall hat and a tight coat, but you must not play cricket or go on the river; you may play with a Noah's ark or some Scriptural toy, but you must not play draughts or

Digitized by Google

chess or billiards. What would St. Paul, with his great broad mind, have said to these ineffably silly distinctions, which always and everywhere are a survival of either Gnosticism with its "touch not, taste not, handle not," or the relics of the most legalized form of Judaism? He would, I am certain, have made short work of such ineffably absurd distinctions. But, on the other hand, he would have tried to help men to rise to the grand idea of Sunday; he would not have encouraged them in mere reactionary license. He would have said, I doubt not, "Let not your liberty be a stumblingblock to others." He would have said, "Consider the idea of the day, the weekly commemoration of the Resurrection, and see how you can best rise to it. If you think you can rise to it by putting away every week-day book and association, do so by all means; but don't judge others who do not find such a course necessary. "He that regardeth the day, regardeth it to the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day to the Lord, he doth not regard it." He would have said, I am certain, to all, "Do not forget the true and real idea of Sunday—that it is a day when it is your privilege to join in the Communion of Christ's Body and Blood, to worship God—to forget that is to disfranchise yourself, to cast away the greatest of blessings. But he would have had neither sympathy nor patience with that travesty of

Digitized by Google

Sunday observance which, after leaving out or relegating to a very subordinate place that worship which gives the true key-note to Sunday, locks the door on all innocent amusement, and views even riding a bicycle as an immoral indulgence. To lie in bed late, to do no work, to eat more than usual, and then to sleep it off, is a very low ideal; and even if such a Sunday observance be crowned by the occasional achievement of going to Church after tea, it strikes one as all beginning at the wrong end, and only ending with what ought to have been the beginning.

Let us try and rise to a principle. Just as the business of week-days is work first, and then recreation as fitting for work, so the business of Sundays is worship first, and then recreation as fitting us for renewed work and renewed worship. A great broad principle like that meets all that is permanent in the teaching of the Jewish law. It meets and harmonizes with Apostolic procedure; it treats man as a rational being with a body as well as a soul; it will work itself out in every noble and useful life, on far higher levels than the swaddling clothes of prohibitions. "Touch not, taste not;" "don't do this; it is wrong to play at that." What is the business of Sunday? Worship, and then recreation. What is the business of week-days? Work, and then recreation. Recreation holds the same place in both—a subordinate one.

Digitized by Google

It is said, I know, and said with much apparent plausibility, if you leave men with a principle of that sort they will use it as far as it suits them, as far as recreation goes, and leave the more serious side out. Of course, that is no doubt what many do at present—some of set purpose, others because the fashion of the day sets in that direction, and they swim easily with the stream. But is it right, is it honest, to endeavour to stem this current by setting up a purely self-constituted set of observances which are supposed to be likely to maintain a principle, and treating these observances as part of God's commandments, a sort of fictitious breakwater to protect the main sea-wall? Is it honest to tell men that a number of things arbitrarily chosen out of one's own brain are wrong on Sunday merely in order to drive them into a corner, and to induce them to go to Church by shutting every other place against them? Is that a means of keeping up the sanctities of the day? One is almost ashamed to ask such a question. To me it seems so far more likely to lead men to a true feeling about Sunday, if you say to them, "Worship is a great privilege as well as a first duty of Sunday—worship is the satisfaction of the deepest instincts of the human soul. It is not an end in itself; it is the scaffolding which supports the aspirations which really elevate your life. The



Digitized by Google

fact that the Service is not to your mind entirely makes no difference. Worship is a means, not an end. Do not rob yourself of what is to you one of the great refining, elevating influences of life. Worship not only lifts you up to God—it brings you into the closest contact, into the highest spiritual sympathy with your fellow-men ; it is an outward sign of the inward oneness of men in their deepest nature. Worship is the offering that sanctifies all your ordinary pursuits." As the Master said, "Give alms of your goods, and behold, all things are clean unto you," so the same principle will hold here. Worship God, and behold all things on Sunday are clean unto you. If ever the *duty* of worship is to be recognized, it will be by putting the *privilege* of worship forward, by restating it on the highest grounds — not by making all innocent pleasures on Sunday afternoon seem sinful, but by setting forth Sunday morning worship as the offering which sanctifies all else. It is beginning at the wrong end to say "You shall go to church, and for fear you shouldn't go you shall be induced to think everything else sinful." The right way to speak to men is to say, "There is this great opportunity ; use it, and you will live." The one is Judaism with its prohibitions, its "do not ;" the other is Christianity with "do this, and thou shalt live."

Ah! but it is in somebody's mind now, "See

Digitized by Google

what you are opening a door to. You are opening the door to all sorts of license, which will sweep away all observances and turn churches into concert-rooms." I am opening no door, but two things are quite clear to me in this and every age. God wants no man's lie to protect His interests, and if the only way in which the observance of Sunday is to be retained is by a system of prohibitions which are founded on falsehood, the observance is not worth much. And the other is that religion will never do all it may and might for people till Sunday observance and other things are put forward, not as a bondage, but as a privilege which makes all life a new thing. There are questions that want restating. The Sunday question is one. It wants restating on the high grounds of Christian privilege, on the grounds of the new "law of liberty." An intelligent view of the privilege of worship is the keynote to the right view of Sunday, and that once gained, all subordinate and secondary questions with one exception may be left to settle themselves. That one exception is the consideration of the spiritual opportunities and the leisure of others. Every one has a right to opportunities of worship, to opportunities of rest and recreation on Sunday. In a complex community like ours there must be much necessary labour, but it is a most absolute duty to see that we do not increase it in such a

Digitized by Google

way as to deprive those dependent on us of all opportunities. This is the real danger against which it is the duty of the clergy to protest vigorously in the interests of those who are employed either as servants or railway porters, or in whatever capacity. When the duty of worship is recognized, there is nothing to be said against amusement on Sunday that does not involve any undue labour on the part of others. No one has a right in Christ's Name to say a word against it. But those—and they are especially the great majority of those around us in this part of London—who can and do amuse themselves every day and night of their lives, have no right to amuse themselves on Sunday in such a way as to deprive servants and others of their only day of rest, their only opportunity of worship. They do it, and do it increasingly, many of them with no thought of the selfishness of which they are guilty, and the bitter resentments which they are provoking. No doubt, the appeal of men who work hard all the week and want to go into the country on Sunday afternoon is a strong one. But it is not the hard-worked public men; it is the idle drones who are the chief organizers of Sunday pleasures, who are forcing those who are hard-worked all the week to work on Sunday too. The increase of Sunday labour is a serious question. In the season very few servants in some houses can

Digitized by Google

either enter a Church or see their friends; large luncheon-parties, large teas, large dinner-parties are more and more the rule. And the only time some servants can ever get to Church or see their friends, is on those days when their employers go into the country for Sunday. The whole system is selfish to the last extent. It would be quite different if those who entertain on Sundays in the most elaborate fashion, could not entertain on other days, or if they limited their Sunday entertainments to plainer fashions, such as used to be the case; but the result of this new fashion is that the rest and the spiritual opportunities of others are sacrificed to a thoughtless selfishness in a number of large houses in this part of London. The highest sanction of the Jewish Sabbath was that it was the bond of sympathy, "Remember, thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day." What can be more piteous than that we should use the spiritual counterpart as a day when we rob others of their rest and of those spiritual opportunities which are their right? No one can really be considered to do his duty to those whom he employs, who does not give one opportunity of attending Church and some hours of rest to every one of them on Sunday. To say that they will not go to Church is easy—that is

Digitized by Google

their responsibility; yours is only to give them the opportunity.

Then again as to locomotion. In theory there is no better or healthier way of spending Sunday afternoon than by driving to Richmond or taking the train to Maidenhead, and there is no harm but this, viz. that a holiday spent by you in that way means that other people get no holiday at all. Locomotion makes a difficulty in London that does not exist in the country. In many cases now the health, comfort, the happiness, and the home life of railway men are sacrificed to enable not the poor hard-worked public servants, but the idle pleasure-seekers, to do on Sunday what in some shape or other they do every day of their lives. The very men who often speak on platforms against overwork are found, by a strange irony, depriving their victims of the one holiday that can possibly be theirs. The weary brain-worker who uses the ordinary Sunday traffic arrangements to find his rest and quiet stands in one category; the weary revellers, who, tired of revelling in London, have had on some lines special trains provided for the sake of getting them out of London on Sunday are the people whose growing selfishness demands a wide and a firm protest. As far as recreation goes, every day is a holiday to them, vapid and empty as are their amusements—useless and pernicious as are their lives, as

Digitized by Google

they go from race to race, from one party to another, from lounging in the park to idle gossiping in houses. They might be tolerated as the necessary dregs of a high civilization, the branch against which the Divine sentence—"Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" is surely going forth; but when they proceed to carry their thirst for amusement to the mischievous extreme of reducing the lives of others to the level of beasts of burden, it is time to speak strongly about the mischief they are doing. If they could ever be induced to think of others, to show them the kindness, the ordinary kindness, of giving to *employés* one opportunity to every six they have for themselves—they might do much to check unnecessary Sunday labour by their own forbearance and by their own example. In proportion as the great mass of leisured people do this, we shall keep all the essentials of our English Sunday.

I believe that if this were put before people, some diminution of the real danger that is threatening the English Sunday might be attained. But it will never be done by drawing arbitrary lines about permissible kinds of recreation, or by obscuring the teaching of the Church of England on the fourth commandment. It will only be done by a real movement on the part of the church-going laity, a real protest against the selfishness of increased Sunday labour.

Digitized by Google

I say the church-going laity, for no sermons or protests in Church will reach that portion of the people of whom I have been speaking, for the best of reasons, that they are not there to hear them; that to them Sunday is a name and Church a synonym for something which is dull. But those who do come to Church meet such men in society, and, if they had the courage, might ask them a few straight questions. When next any one confesses to you in social intercourse with the hypocritical excuse that, "of course they know it is very wrong" that he or she has gone to a party on Sunday evening, which turned to a ball after twelve o'clock, or organized a water-party to Maidenhead by the 10 a.m. train on Sunday, you might ask the straight questions, "Do you never think of railway servants or of your own household? Are you, who have every day to amuse yourself—are you, such a selfish monster as to take their only day from them?" People who do not understand what you mean by "the priceless rest and the sanctity of the Lord's Day," or by the irreligious observance of Sunday, understand what you mean by gross selfishness; and it is gross selfishness that we have to fight against in these matters. And the evil grows. Sunday dinner-parties are on the increase. When we leave Church on Sunday evenings, we see here as many carriages

Digitized by Google

containing people going out to dinner as on week-days. That means something very serious; it means heartless thoughtlessness on the part of some of my parishioners. I prefer to believe it is only true of those of them who do not attend their parish Church. But it does mean that many of my parishioners get not even one chance of attending Church, even on Sunday evenings, or of ever seeing their friends.

From the point of view of all serious-minded men, the English Sunday, with all its defects, is a priceless blessing. Perhaps we shall never know how great a blessing till the selfishness of some of the upper class has marred it and made it a common day—till shops are open, and men work seven days as on six; then we shall know what we have lost; and then it will be seen that it is not a question for the clergy, but for the people. What we can do to stem the tide of Sunday selfishness, which is real Sunday desecration, is to set our faces against it and to point out its consequences. What we can do in other ways is to try more and more to make our own Sundays days of resurrection, days of worship, days of aspiration, of really simple intercourse, and of quiet pleasure and recreation; days when we think more than ever of others, of their highest good, of their spiritual and social opportunities; days

Digitized by Google

when we grow more and more into that which is the only real, true discipleship as laid down by the great Master: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one towards another."

Digitized by Google

## *CHRISTIANITY AND LIBERTY.*

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."—2 COR. iii. 17.

IT is a great and an exceedingly bold claim made in that far-off age by one who understood, if anybody did, all that the Gospel meant, and all that its teaching involved—who saw into the inner meanings and results of that Divine message to which he had consecrated his life; it is a startling claim in view of much that has happened since, and much that is popularly supposed and believed now. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Can we justify it? Was it the dream of an enthusiast which joined together the workings of the Divine Spirit and that freedom which we often claim as the especial achievement of our own age and our own time? Liberty, men might say we can claim now—liberty of inquiry, liberty of thought, liberty of action; it is the watchword of our deliverance, but it is due to civilization, to progress. We have won it by a

Digitized by Google

determined stand against tyranny of every kind, against ecclesiastical absolutism and spiritual despotism. It has been wrung from the spiritual power. How are you going to claim it as its natural fruit and result of the Divine Spirit? This is the sort of language with which we are familiar enough, and if it is apt to be a trifle bombastic, it has enough plausibility about it to make it worth our attention.

Now, in attempting to show that any true idea of liberty finds its great and most absolute origin in the teaching of Christ and in the energizing work of the Holy Spirit, it is necessary to be very clear as to what we mean by liberty. For there are in every age certain words which respond to certain deep feelings in the hearts of men. Liberty is one such word. There have been generations of men in almost every country that have learnt the meaning of the word "liberty" by a hard and bitter experience of its opposite; for them the word has had as definite a meaning as deliverance from Egypt had for Israel. Such words in time get a halo round them of great glory, but a halo somewhat misty as halos are apt to be, and often succeeding generations make use of them in a rhetorical fashion, knowing that the use of them will awake responsive feelings and even thunders of applause, without awakening any particularly definite conception of what is meant by them. The temp-

Digitized by Google

tation to use catchwords is a temptation common to all who have to address their fellow-men either on the highest or on everyday questions—a temptation which besets preachers as well as politicians. It is difficult for each of these to be great enough and sincere enough to avoid talking cant; and talking cant I take to be the repetition of phrases which sound well without the arousal of any corresponding feeling within one, *i.e.* phrasemongering of the worst kind. It is a great temptation to cover leanness of thought by high-sounding phrases and popular catchwords, a temptation only to be overcome in a man's self. If any man trusts to the inspiration of his audience, and is sensitive to that inspiration, he will inevitably begin to talk cant unless he has, first of all, subjected his utterances to the twofold test that is involved in the questions, (1) Do I mean that? and (2) What do I mean by that? If the first question can be answered satisfactorily, it by no means follows that the second question always can. And it is a commonplace to say that the word "liberty" has often been appropriated by cant; it has often meant liberty to go to the bad in the shortest possible way. The prodigal son only claimed liberty. It has often meant freedom to please myself, and to be entirely inconsiderate of the rights and feelings of others. It has been seized (so to speak) by the ban-

Digitized by Google

ditti of gross self-indulgence and insatiable rapacity, and used to make vice and crime appear respectable and even noble. And therefore, when we claim liberty as the outcome of the workings of the Divine Spirit, it is necessary to be very clear what we mean.

Now, it is obvious that in the widest sense liberty means unfettered freedom to do, say, and think what we like, and, startling as it may sound, we may be contented with that definition, if only we can make the word "like" mean enough; but the adequacy of this definition entirely depends on the amount of meaning which is put into that word. If we take the word "like" in its widest and ultimate sense as a permanent instinct, we shall agree that we do not like what hurts us, or destroys us, or stands in the way of our being happy, or even being good. We may think for a moment that we like things that would hurt or destroy us, as a little child thinks it would like the flower at the edge of a precipice, and may cry at being pulled back; but just as the child would not really like to be killed or crippled, just as no one would call it liberty for the child to have its immediate desire, so we should not really like things hurtful and injurious if we saw them as they are. So, if we take liberty as meaning being allowed to think, say, and do what we like, we must remember how deep the sense is in which we use the word "like."

Digitized by Google

It takes very little experience to arrive at this stage; a few early experiences of consequences soon imprint it on our minds. We reach the time when we would *like*, in a deep sense of the word, to be different to what we are, better tempered, or more straightforward, or less idle; we see from all sorts of different experiences the slavery that mere caprice, thinking only of the pleasure of the moment, has brought us to; we discover, alas! how dearly we pay for giving way to that caprice, pay in the loss of power to do what we really like.

We pass on more slowly to a deeper truth about liberty, namely, that liberty involves recognition and obedience to law, and that the more complete liberty is only attained by the more exact obedience. By law I should perhaps explain that I do not mean now the results of the wisdom of our legislators, as embodied in Acts of Parliament, but laws of nature, laws of man's own being. To confuse the two is very fatal to clear thinking. Something might be said about obedience to the laws of the country being conducive to liberty, but the discussion of the question would lead us into subjects directly political, which, when they are not also moral, are unsuitable to this place. My present point is, man's liberty is perpetually advanced by obedience to the laws of nature, or the highest laws which affect his own being. Men may

Digitized by Google

deny this, and claim to be exempt from such laws and call them tyranny, but they find themselves ultimately much in the same position as people who would prefer to drive over a country at their own sweet will in order to escape from the tyranny of the roads, and whose arrival at their destination would be, to say the least of it, unduly delayed; or as people who might prefer to go to sea and trust to their own vision, in order to escape from the tyranny of compasses and charts; it does not need a prophet to foretell us their end. And the higher we go, the more necessary it is to obey law in order to be free. The highest studies demand the most patient obedience to law, to rules founded on experience. The great painter is able to do what he likes with his brush; he seems to be so free in his treatment, so released from severe rules; but he gains this magical touch only when he has submitted to the long drudgery of technical training. The musician is able to make the instrument speak as he desires, only when he has, and because he has, yielded to the law which imposed a persevering use of scales and exercises. So it is in all real proficiency. To become master of a subject, you must submit to rule. Liberty, *i.e.* the power to do what one likes, the power of mastery which frees one from at least slavish adherence to rule, is gained only by obedience

Digitized by Google

to law, obedience to the rules laid down by those who have mastered the subjects before you. Now, if all this is so, can we reasonably suppose that when we mount a little higher still into the region of moral and spiritual effort, this undeviating experience is to be abruptly and arbitrarily contradicted? Is it conceivable that a false liberty which means an indulgence in mere caprice with no reference to wisdom or experience, should be the rule in the highest things? And yet is it not just this false liberty, this license to dispense with rules which are the outcomes of past wisdom and experience, and to trust to mere caprice, which men are thinking about and extolling, when they represent the Christian Church and Christian methods, as the antagonists of freedom?

It really depends, as one sees more and more, on the way in which men approach these questions. As long as they approach them in a purely speculative, still more a purely rhetorical, fashion, lash themselves into a foam of rage over supposed oppositions of Christian creed to real freedom, they will never see the sense of saying "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." What they will say, "Liberty! you with your creeds and dogmas and fixed abodes of thought, you with your reactionary superstitions, talking of liberty! You are its bitterest enemies."



Digitized by Google

We are all too familiar with that kind of rhetoric to do more than mentally attempt to appraise its value at the lowest possible figure, but when it has exhausted itself, and is, perhaps, struggling for breath, we may be disposed to ask quietly what power or ability to do what one likes—at any rate, that is worth doing—is ever gained without in some way having something analogous to a creed, and without using fixed methods. Musicians, painters, architects, as well as builders and sailors, are all free enough, but freedom in every case means and is insured by the sacrifice of mere caprice, by belief in some creed on the subject—at any rate, by obedience to clearly ascertained law. Is it, then, conceivable that when you get to the highest life—*i.e.* the moral and spiritual—suddenly a great change sets in; that neither chart nor compass, neither rule nor creed, but each man's instinct, each man's fancy and desire, produces the immediate consequence which he wants, and that caprice, which leads to confusion and slavery everywhere else, leads to true freedom here?

The mathematician might as well dispense with the axioms of his Euclid as fettering his liberty, as a moral being reject the laws of God, and expect to advance unfettered without them. We know practically that he must only wander into ever-deepening confusion.

Digitized by Google

I say we know practically; and it is perhaps clearer to us when we look at it from a practical point of view than from anywhere else. The bare, hard, often bitter facts of life daily contradict the notion that there is any real liberty to be found in contradicting or ignoring the guidance of law,—the hard, bitter facts of life which cause so much sorrow. Every pain we suffer that is due to past self-indulgence, every loss of touch with others that is due to past selfishness, means the same thing; we have done what we chose at the moment, and hindered our real freedom. The consequence is, that now we cannot do what we like; "we cannot do the things that we would;" we are not free. There has been no Divine Spirit welcomed; no breathings and inspirations watched for and cherished; and so there is no liberty. Ah! how we groan to do the things that we would! But, again, how slow is our confession *meâ culpâ!*—"it is by my own fault that I am not of more use to others." And with it all we learn so slowly. How little our failures affect us—how surprisingly little; how little we learn from them; how contented we are to be deceived if only we may have the gambler's hope of a new thing to-morrow which will not, perhaps, deceive us so completely! And so we go on looking to false means, trusting to caprice, to the gambler's instinct—something will turn up apart from

Digitized by Google

our own efforts; something will come and set us free; some chance will unfetter these grinding circumstances, this paralysis of will. If it comes to the very worst, some day we shall have to begin to set to work on ourselves. But we want to go on a little longer free from restrictions; we want, in our blindness, to be free a little longer. In truth, every day only chains us more completely; every day we shut our eyes to the fact which we know really better than we know anything in the world, viz. that if ever we are to be free we must begin to master ourselves —that nothing outside can dispense with the great inward necessity of struggle with self.

Nothing is really better known than that every man, woman, or child who wishes to be free must begin by a struggle to obey law. Nothing is more practically known to each of us than the truth that the Spirit and the flesh are "contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would;" that only "if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." There is no real liberty till that battle is won. And because that battle with self can never be begun, much less continued, without the breath, the inspiration, the energy that comes from the higher world, it is written, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," and that statement is justified every day by the

Digitized by Google

enlarged freedom of God's own children, who look up into His face and cry, "Abba, Father." And that you can test the truth of to-day, to-morrow, any day. Any life, however humble or difficult, will yield that experience. All that is painful or degrading or deteriorating within you rises from the pertinacity with which the flesh pulls you back from that which, when done, brings, if not immediate happiness, yet at least expansion and self-respect. And it is in little things that the foundations of true freedom are laid.

To have such a mastery over the body as to be able to leave one's bed; to do one's dull work patiently; to bear hunger and pain and being tired; to give up quietly and without ill temper one's own pleasure, is very difficult, and yet he who cannot do these things is a slave and not a free man. And in themselves these occasions which the Spirit brings to us look so petty; there can be nothing in them. A little more bed, or food, or fireside are things that look so innocent. There is no harm in them—there can be none. Yes, none unless the true life is betrayed because of them; that is the test. The smallness of things proves nothing. Let us remember there is no harm in silver, and thirty pieces is not much; but how much evil thirty pieces of silver brought to Judas! A very large sum might have startled him, and made him pause and look at the

Digitized by Google

baseness of his crime; but thirty pieces of silver seemed a trifle. Ah, brethren, there is the danger for us all that we sell, as has been said, "our true life by pennyworths,"* and think these small self-indulgences not worth considering, and yet they are deliberate turnings away from good! It is the *penny* bribes, the trifling indulgences that destroy liberty. For liberty means power over self, and power over self is gained or lost, not by poundsworths or by shillingsworths, but by pennyworths.

Only "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;" and the Spirit guides us in the least things.

It is the quiet daily temperance in little things, it is the daily endurance of work, it is the habit of obedience to law, that issues in great things, that makes men free. Temperance, in the widest sense, makes men free even as regards bodily strength and activity, and the same rule holds good in the mind, in our real life.

That liberty which is in some men, that mountain-top atmosphere that pervades them, which makes them cheerful and contented even in hardship, even in unsympathetic surroundings; that liberty we so envy, that makes them so independent of circumstances, so obliging, so ready to give up their own way, so little tied by rule if good is to be done; that

* Rev. E. Thring.

Digitized by Google

high spiritual gift that led the great Apostle to become a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain the Jews;—all this was the result of long wrestlings, with self on his knees, of a gradual informing of the Kingdom and the Will within him. That liberty which is no mere random gift, like something won in a scramble or a lottery, but is the slow and painful result of daily effort, daily Communion with God, daily efforts to control our appetites and temper, daily obedience to a higher law than mere caprice—that liberty let us long for and strive after.

Look in how many ways men are slaves. One is the slave of his temper, another of his tongue, another of his appetites. Nothing is less true of such men than to say that they are free; they neither say nor do what they really wish to: "the evil that they do they hate." At other times they are a sad and awful warning of the slavery of mere caprice and self-indulgence. On the other hand, those who are led by the Spirit of God, those over whom the higher spiritual influences rule, ask about the daily concerns of life, not "Will this immediately please me?" not "Will it bring me a pennyworth of gratification and ruin my real life?" but "How shall I use this thing so as to develop my higher nature? How shall I use this occasion, to learn in it and through it greater self-control?"

Digitized by Google

For it is in our efforts to gain greater self-control, and in the apparent loss of liberty which they involve, that alone true and lasting freedom is found, the freedom of self-mastery. And only the Divine Spirit gives us force and energy to gain that self-control; and so it is that in practical experience of mankind the statement is continually being justified, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

Digitized by Google

## *THE SIFTING OF PETER.*

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."—LUKE xxii. 31, 32.

THE character of St. Peter presents one of those singular yet very common mixtures of strength and weakness that strike us as at once utterly human, and consequently attractive. We feel at home at once with a man who was no mere boaster, but who, nevertheless, could not always do all that he had said he could and would; whose intentions were beyond suspicion, while his very failures are so *natural*, so much like our own, that they seem full of encouragement. It is ennobling to sit at St. John's feet and hear his calm voice telling us of the beauty of unselfishness, of the moral loveliness of a life of love, of its likeness to God; it lifts us up into a higher world. There is a strange controlling power in his very words; they make us serious; their very sound conveys something high, and pure, and unearthly, and

Digitized by Google

Divine. There is that quiet certainty, that gentle touch of authority about them that comes from half a century of steady, sure, ripe experience. But lovely as it is to listen to him, yet we feel that St. John is far above us, that he is not like us, that he moves in a different world. But with St. Peter it is wholly otherwise. He seems to travel the same weary road, and stumble over the same stones that we do. He is not floating in the air, but he is alongside us on the dusty, difficult journey. He is with us as we sit down by the roadside and hate ourselves for our weakness and our folly. Even his very faults make him so *dear* to us; they are such natural faults, so akin to our own, so *human*, so almost boyish; such self-confident impulsiveness—"Lord, I will go with Thee to prison and to death;" "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now?" "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" There is all the go of a resolute, self-confident, impulsive nature; all the passionate vehemence for the sake of the cause he really had at heart. And then, on the other side, the very facility with which he yields to the influence brought to bear on him brings him near to us. Some girl laughs with her contemptuous titter, and he is thrown off his balance. She comes up with her insinuating smile, "And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth," and he cannot stand a scene before

Digitized by Google

all these people; his resolution fades away, only to revive next minute with the bitterest self-reproach and the most desolating agony. All his faults endear him to us, because in his faults there is nothing of meanness and pettiness, and it is the mean and the petty—the dirt in human nature that repels us. We love the impulsive and the generous. At the root, too, of his faults there are quick sensibilities; the energy that cannot endure merely to bear, but must be doing; the generous confidence in self, as well as in others, which, though it needed a repressive lesson, yet always makes a noble nature, and yet a nature open to many perils. A *man* he was, then, in every sense of the word—a man cast in no common model, easily and readily touched by spiritual influences, and responding to them strongly; accessible, therefore, as such men are, to evil influences as well as to good. For such there is no safety in inaction, as there is for the dull, cautious, calculating natures that never risk a fall, and never attain, even for five minutes, to any level above the uttermost commonplace.

A nature, then, his was with great capacities for high service, and, in and through those capacities, with great liabilities to danger. The first in every enterprise in the old fishing days, the first to organize every expedition, the first to recover himself and follow his Master when all forsook Him and fled,

Digitized by Google

and yet so strangely miscalculating his strength as to go into the very trial scene and deny Him there; to behave in a supreme moment, in the crisis, in a way that was utterly out of harmony with his real nobility and strength of character.

I. Such a character needed obviously sifting, and therefore Satan was allowed to sift him as wheat. There was in Peter this great defect—a large amount of self-confidence, which made him quick at speaking and acting; and self-confidence in the New Testament is always treated one way, as that which shuts out confidence in God. It is the enemy of faith. Faith is insight, and self-confidence is a blinding influence. Again and again there is pressed upon us the necessity of a lowly estimate of self: "He that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted;" God Who dwells in the high and Holy place, dwells also with him who is of a humble spirit. If God was to dwell in Peter, if the Divine was really to take up His abode in him and rule him, if the impulsive and vehement strength of the man was to be made a steadfast and certain fire, and to be hallowed by the Divine indwelling, so that he might lead the Apostles during those critical times which were coming, then clearly his self-confidence must be purged out of him, he must be sifted as wheat, the grain must be separated from the chaff.

Digitized by Google

Even if the process was severe, it was utterly necessary, for nothing but very severe measures would avail to touch a fault that so easily forgives itself as does self-confidence.

Christ saw, then, that Peter must go through the fire itself to be cured of his tendencies; that Satan must be allowed to win a strange victory before Peter would be really all that he might be, and was meant to be to the other Apostles. His mood on the night Christ spoke these words was imperious and self-confident. He showed it in the very impulse that induced him to correct the Divine Wisdom—"Thou shalt never wash my feet;" and then in the request, "Not my feet, but my hands and head." It all betrayed a blind and impetuous self-reliance—a desire to put Christ right, to suggest something lacking in His ways. The impression grows as we pass into the garden. It is his own loyalty he trusts: "If I should die with Thee I will not deny Thee." Even when he falls asleep, it teaches him nothing about his own danger. He learns nothing; he only rushes forward to a self-chosen act of violence. He waits for no command; he cuts off the servant's ear, and makes it necessary that Christ should undo his cruel deed. All this is leading up to his desertion. He forgets everything, his protestations and promises, and joins the scatter-

Digitized by Google

ing band; then, for very shame, he returns. Yet, instead of pushing forward to Christ's side in court, he lingers outside; he talks as indifferently as he can with the soldiers; he casts in his lot, *i.e.*, with the very men who had arrested Christ; and then there comes the great sorrow, the vehement denial, the passionate avowal, the oaths, the curses, "I know not the Man." One has well said, "It is a cruel spectacle, one of the saddest on which the stars ever looked down—a brave man turned coward, a true man turned liar, a strong man weeping bitterly over the very sin which of all sins might well have seemed impossible to him." * It seems almost hard that he should have been brought so low. But would anything less have brought him to himself? Would anything else have taken down that self-confidence which was spreading over his whole nature? Would anything short of it have emptied out self in such a fashion as to enable him to receive the Holy Spirit and to find Christ? No. Hard as it seems to be sifted thus like wheat, to be put to open shame—hard as it is to do the very thing we would soonest not have done in five-sixths of our natures, yet I think we should dare to pray to be sifted like Peter, if only we can learn Peter's lesson as

* Dr. Cox's Sermon on St. Peter's "Sifting and Conversion," p. 307, in the "Genesis of Evil," to which I owe some of the thoughts of this sermon.

Digitized by Google

thoroughly and fully as he did; if only we can thus be delivered, as he was, from the failure and regret which follow too surely confidence in self.

II. But his fall is only half his story. Let us pass for a few moments to consider his restoration, the completion of the sifting process. The Divine way is not to put even a vainglorious man down and leave him in his dejection, for no state is so dangerous as one of mere disgust with self. God lets us find out our weakness, but He teaches us at the same time our real strength in Him; and so Christ does not for a moment let Peter alone. At the moment of his lowest fall, while oaths were on his lips, "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." There was an expression in the Master's face that made that look the turning-point in Peter's life. He did not speak. There are times when words are not wanted—times, perhaps, when real feeling cannot speak. Christ simply *looked* at Peter—a look that told of real sorrow and real love, and had in it something of the reproach that a great love, when deeply wounded, must feel. It was enough. It brought to his mind all that had been so piteously forgotten; it brought back the *real* Peter; and "he went out and wept bitterly." They were tears, I doubt not, terrible to witness—the tears of a strong man in deep agony; of a man broken down by remorse, a man who must shun his

Digitized by Google

fellows, and creep away anywhere out of everybody's sight, that no one may remind him of his shame. So he went for those three days we know not whither into solitude, till John found him and brought him to the tomb on Easter morning; but in those silent hours the work was done. His mind went back over the old story. He came to himself. The past lived again, as it does in such moments. How often he had been betrayed by his self-confident temper; how again and again it had led him into sin and shame; how long before he had boldly cast himself into the lake, only to fail at the critical moment in showing any real faith. And so he would be brought to feel that which marks a real stage in a man's development —when he pieces his life together, and sees that his weakness and error had early roots; that he had not to mourn a single faithlessness out of harmony with his real self, but that his denial was but the crowning catastrophe of a long story of self-confidence which was always poisoning his good, and plunging him deeper into sin and shame.

III. There is only time this morning to note one thing further in Christ's dealing with him, in that sifting of him which completed his restoration. He had boasted, on the night of betrayal, of a love that surpassed that of his brethren, "Though all men should be offended, yet will not I," and these

Digitized by Google

swelling words had been followed by three open and shameful denials. No other method of restoration is possible save by in some way reminding him of these things, the boasting as well as the failure. Hence the form of the question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" *i.e.* more than the other disciples. Do you still compare yourself with them? And there is an honesty, and yet a deep humility in the answer, "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." He is contented now with the simple answer; he no longer measures himself against others. "They may love Thee better than I, but Thou knowest all things. On Thy consciousness of my love I throw myself with all my shame; Thou knowest I love Thee." Still the process goes on, three times, till Peter is grieved, for he does not see the kind intention of the Master to undo his three denials by three confessions. But still, grieved as he is, he bears it patiently. Just think what this shows about his self-knowledge and his changed life. During the old boastful days, if he had been asked three times, "Lovest thou Me?" how he would have burst into vainglorious boasts, even if he had not rebuked Christ for suspecting him. Now that is all gone; only the quiet appeal to the knowledge of Christ, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." "Old things are passed



Digitized by Google

away; behold, all things are become new." He is another man; each false step has been retraced; each failure has been retrieved; the old self-confidence has become trust in God.

At last he is fit to lead, to guide; at last he is in deed, and not in name only, the Petros—the Rock on whom others can lean in the day of trial, which can know no more the shame of weakness or the disgrace of failure.

The story of his sifting suggests many things. I confine myself to two considerations.

I. Look how the Divine order runs through his life and makes its unity impressive. At first Peter's life, as told so shortly in the New Testament, seems a chaos, a mere tangle, with no forethought, no settled and consistent plan about it. What a puzzle it must have looked when he first really saw it, a series of inconsistent fragments, of generous impulses and weak boastings, a mass of disorder and self-contradiction! And yet God had a plan for him—we see it as we study his life—though Peter had no plan for himself.

Ah, if we would only rise to believing the same thing about ourselves! We look back on our lives, and we see a mass of contradictions, confusions, good resolutions broken, false steps made—a jumble, a chaos it seems to be; there is no possible unity

Digitized by Google

about it; a collection of accidental and purposeless fragments, of firm resolutions and of miserable denials, of forgetfulness of all that is great and noble because some maid laughs. It all fills us with a sense of broken fragments; and those moments when the eye of Christ rested on us, when we understood, seem so scattered. All is confused and blurred and marred. Ah! let us get deeper. God has a plan for us as for Peter. With us, too, false steps bring misery, and are slowly and painfully retraced; with us too the triumphs of faith are set against failures; weak denials are retrieved by brave confessions. We do not take in the processes, but the evil is gradually sifted out, the good is consolidated, cultivated, made permanent, and in and through the strange discipline we trace a higher ordering than common sense will supply—the touch of Christ, the hand of God. Don't let us think that our passing impulses and our changing ideas or our broken purposes are all; if we will only believe and try to love, even through and by and amid our failures, God will bring out His unity—will so dispose our very falls that they will sift us from evil, and convert us to that true goodness that always trusts and never boasts.

We never understand here how God is training us for a greater life beyond. We get glimpses, but

Digitized by Google

we never see the whole picture. Only one thing matters, and that is to be certain that, however far wrong we may be, however low we may sink, God can and will, if we turn to Him, make some way of escape, contrive some threefold opportunity, however painful, of retrieving our threefold failure.

II. Again, Peter did not lose his strength because he surrendered self-confidence. Look at him in the Acts of the Apostles, a strong man to the end, strong with the strength of a confidence in his Master that is not self-reliance.

Don't let any one persuade us that a real Christian life is a weak thing—a thing of mere compliance, of bows and smiles and compliments, of insincere expressions, of universal amiability, and of glozing over men's sins and follies. Let us learn to call things by their right names. St. Peter's language to Elymas is a good instance: "Thy money perish with thee," is no utterance of a man who has wasted his strength in mere insincere civilities. Strength of character does not consist in perpetual forwardness, but in the self-regulation that enables a man to speak and act strongly at the right moment. Let us be sure, if we place our trust in God and cleave to great causes as dear to Him, the less we shall need to apologize for our own weakness, the less we shall make the mistake of apologizing for strong lan-

Digitized by Google

guage when we boldly rebuke evil. We shall make fewer mistakes; we shall be stronger in action, and really carry greater weight, because while we are increasingly certain (and there is no certainty so necessary) that we can achieve nothing lasting by our unassisted efforts, *i.e.* without God, we shall also be undoubtedly convinced of the corresponding certainty that we, in spite of all our past story of weakness and failure, can yet, like the sifted Peter, "do all things through Christ that strengtheneth us."

Digitized by Google

## *THE TRUE REST.*

"And I said, O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I get me away far off, and remain in the wilderness."—Ps. lv. 6, 7.

THEY are the words of a tired man seeking some relief from utter weariness, some outlet for his restlessness—words that come home to us all sometimes in the weary moments of our restlessness, the deep intense yearning for change into other conditions, for the wings of a dove to bear us to the silence of the wilderness; words that escape from us like a sigh of anguish; we know not what we want; we only know we want rest, and rest seems to be unattainable where we are and as we are. We think it might be found somewhere under other conditions—in the seclusion of a convent, or in the loneliness of the wilderness, or in the apparent stillness of death, or at any rate, in some plan for the removal of outward trials, in some deliverance from haunting temptation, in some removal of burden,—in these, or something

Digitized by Google

like these, we think we might find it. Let us try and see this morning whether it really is so, or whether we are not rather only sinking ever deeper into unrest by giving way to such longings, and then, how the rest which we all want is to be sought and found.

I. Let us look for a moment at the notion that death is a rest. We have all felt it in the presence of death; the silent smiling look that a corpse wears sometimes for a day or two, so strangely peaceful, so pathetic in its stillness, seems to promise that in the grave, there at last, is what we desire and long for. It seems, when we look on the face of the dead, as if all the fever and restlessness were gone, and we jump to the conclusion that life is the cause of this unrest, death is its termination. It is very natural that we should think so, but at the same time the conclusion is a very unreal and untrue one. One would not be hard about it; but to think of death in that way is misleading. Death really is not a deliverer; it is something from which we need in its inmost reality to be delivered. The peaceful face represents nothing of the facts, for the real self that gave the face meaning, character, expression is gone; and when the real self, the motive-power, the spirit is gone, what of that which is true and real can the casket, the covering, tell us? Natural, then, as this conclusion is, comforting as I doubt not it has often

Digitized by Google

been, it is based on an untruth, an unreality. There are many thoughts, many reflections, perhaps many regrets, which a dead face may and must call up most usefully; but don't let us think we can read anything there that is true and real, anything that teaches us at all that to die is to "flee away and be at rest."

Again, there is the further notion that the soul has the wings of a dove and flees away, because at death it is freed from the prison-house of the body, and so, left to itself, finds rest. So we hear people speak of a happy release, and we sigh, and for a moment wish that we could flee away in their fashion; that we could go to sleep, as men seem to when they die; that we could be delivered from haunting temptation, from pride and selfishness and worldliness. But why should we think that we are delivered by death? Why, because pride and selfishness and worldliness produce certain results through our bodies, should we think that the getting rid of the means of outward result, so to speak, touches the central and essential spirit within? Why should our individuality change, and we become less selfish or proud or ill-tempered because the means through which these things are displayed are gone from us; why more self-controlled because the spirit and will and mind are left alone?

Digitized by Google

The same fallacy really underlies all such conceptions, the fallacy that death is a ceasing instead of a becoming—a being under new conditions, no doubt, but still a being—not a ceasing to be—a living on with consciousness of self-identity. How, then, will fleeing into new conditions help us if we have to take ourselves into them? How will it help us to rest, if our restless natures remain, merely because the bodies that have clothed these spirits which are our true selves, and given vent to them, so to speak, are gone from us?

There are, again, other motives besides the mere notion of being free from an encumbrance which prompt men to think of death as a rest—moments when men are neglected, or do not receive the honour or the credit they feel they deserve; they try to comfort themselves with the expectation of a requital hereafter. They think that at last in death they will have some reparation—say in that sense, "Oh that I had the wings of a dove! then would I flee away, and be at rest." But such thoughts are really among the least worthy of being cherished, and I venture to say that, seen by the light of the dawning day, they will seem wretchedly little; they will savour of self-worship and self-praise; they will be the last to which men will want to recur.

"Whatever crazy sorrow saith,
No life that breathes with human breath
Has ever truly longed for death;

Digitized by Google

'Tis life whereof our nerves are scant;
Oh! life, not death, for which we pant—
More life and fuller that I want."

The real fact is, that our whole common thought and mode of expression about death as the sleep, the rest, ignores the one thing we are certain of about it, viz. that death is not a ceasing to be conscious of ourselves, a means of self-forgetfulness. Our whole longing and pining for rest is in reality a longing and pining to be delivered from what we shall not be delivered by that or by anything else, or by any one else except Christ—namely, from ourselves. Death will not deliver us from ourselves, and self it is that we want to flee away from. Men confess it and show it in a hundred ways, most eloquent of the real truth. They confess it by drinking, by plunging into reckless dissipation; they try to destroy the consciousness of their being, to escape self, to dull the sense of responsibility. It is self we want to be delivered from, and death is no deliverance from self; the sleep of death we talk of, but, as our great poet has said, it is a sleep which may have dreams in it. Surely if we think about it seriously—and the more seriously we do think the better—the less should we be disposed to flee to death as a deliverance from self; surely it is but the signal for a flood of forgotten experiences to return; surely it will withdraw

Digitized by Google

us from the things that dissipate and distract, from this "rattling world with its stir and bustle," and it will take from us those objects in which we have contrived to drown thought, and the result must be a greater self-concentration than ever; surely increasing light—to "know even as we are known," will not help us into dark oblivion. No. It is not here that we can look for escape from the spectre that is pursuing us; it is not in death that we can find deliverance from the pains of consciousness, or the stings of conscience; for death is nothing after all but increased consciousness, the new consciousness that comes of being left by ourselves and to ourselves.

II. It is not, then, to death that we must look for deliverance from the unrest from which we groan to be delivered. Nor are there any other "wings of a dove" that could carry us into the land of self-oblivion. Sometimes we think that a mere change in outward circumstances would deliver us, and it cannot be denied that we do gain periods of comparative repose that seem at the time to be absolute rest by deliverance —*e.g.* from outward troubles of sickness and pain, or from some uncongenial companionship that frets and worries us—but we know, if we know anything at all, that the reliefs gained at these times, like all reactions, soon exhaust themselves. So change of scene often does much for the overworked brain, *i.e.* for deliver-

Digitized by Google

ance from temporary and accidental causes of unrest; but if the cause be deeper than some passing infirmity, it happens to us as to the poet of old, "When we are at Naples we would be at Rome, and when at Rome we would be at Naples." The true source of unrest, then, is something deeper within. The soul, the mind, the heart, is its own tormentor, and in the inward parts is the secret bitterness that turns all that is tasted to gall. It is from something which neither circumstances nor death will change that we want deliverance. It is from a sense partly of weakness, partly of isolation, partly of felt unworthiness, from a consciousness within man that he cannot really help himself, that he cries out, "Oh that I had the wings of a dove! then would I flee away, and be at rest." He becomes conscious that he has a spirit within him; he utters a cry for something higher than himself to help him out of this unrest—the unrest caused by a bitter experience, by a sense of loneliness, by his felt unworthiness. He feels that it is something within himself that is his torment; something within himself that neither change of circumstance nor death will deliver him from; something which will not leave him; and the way his experience has woven itself into this self only accentuates and emphasizes the feeling that the one only thing he wants is to be delivered from this haunting burden.

Digitized by Google

Two ways are suggested as a relief from this: one by Buddhism, the other by Christianity. Buddhism suggests that man should lose himself and his sense of self in a distributed life. Christ promises that he shall find deliverance through union with a stronger life that can first expel the unrest, and then nourish the true self; a life that can love enough to enter in and cast out the tormentor from us, for that is what the Christian doctrine of union with Christ really means.

In this offer of Christ's, and in this only, shall we find refuge from the spectre that has been pursuing us, from the pains that attend consciousness of self, from the stings of conscience; not in death—for we want to be delivered from death, and all it means—but in a stronger Life, strong and vigorous enough to wrap up in itself our feebleness, to repair our wastes; in a Love that is full enough to give us that sense of repose upon itself that only love can give, which repose is the only real rest either in life or in death. For the true and only lasting rest of man's spirit is in love. When he can find an object that can really take him in, really embrace, really understand, really become one with him, then there is rest. We are always seeing it even here and now. If we really know the deeper side of human feeling, if we have ever seen any instance of the high possibilities of

Digitized by Google

wedded love, we recognize there a likeness of this truth, and we know something that is luminous to us, when Christ meets us and tells us that in Him here and now, there is deliverance, repose, rest—the rest not of inaction and mere languor, but the rest that comes from deliverance, not only from darkness and error, but from the deeper misery of self; the rest that comes from felt sympathy. Not by removing burdens, but by giving a spirit and a power to bear the burden; not by changing thorns into roses, but by helping us to bear the thorns; not by giving us indolent inaction, or freedom from duty, or mere self-gratification, but by teaching us the blessedness of labour, by showing us that in labour we share His burden; not by leaving us alone, but by dragging us into strife and stern battle, above all, in and through all, by the power of felt association with Himself—by the union of our Baptism, by the perpetually renewed oneness of the Holy Communion—Christ gives us rest here and now.

We, so tired, so restless, so weary, utter the old moan of impatience, "Oh that I had the wings of a dove! then would I flee away, and be at rest." But by degrees we feel that no wings would help us, no mere escape would give us what we want. It is not the wilderness that we really want; it is love here and now, it is interest, it is companionship, it is relief

Digitized by Google

from our loneliness, it is the Hand pierced for love of us, it is the contact with a heart that can feel with us, that knows and understands and can take us in, that at once warns us and encourages us, and that points out the road—the path of duty, the path of service, the path of active self-sacrifice, and then gives a motive, "for My sake," and says, here is your rest, "Whosoever will save his life"—by keeping it from trouble—"shall lose it;" "whosoever will lose his life"—fling it away—"for My sake shall keep it unto life eternal." And we must let Him teach us, else we shall be restless to the end. We shall look on to death to deliver us, but we shall be more restless in death when left to ourselves, when the little distractions that give us periods of repose are gone, and we are left by ourselves and to ourselves; we shall go on to the end, wailing, "Oh that I had the wings of a dove! then would I flee away," and never learn the truth—that not in fleeing away, not in the wilderness, not in happiness, not in enjoyment, but in taking the yoke and bearing the burden, in fellowship with love itself, there and there alone we shall find "rest for our souls." And that because there we shall find peace within, repose in an unseen Presence, on an unfailing Love. The surface of the ocean may be broken by waves, lashed by winds, storm-tossed, restless, but beneath is the unbroken repose of the

Digitized by Google

depths of the sea that no storms affect and no waves disturb.

Will we take Him at His Word? Will we battle against our useless sighings for Mohammed's Paradise, our desire to be freed from annoyances, our wish to flee away and be at rest? Will we learn the lesson which comes so slowly, that in Him and in the consciousness of His love there is rest here and now, rest in the burden and heat of the day, rest in the long afternoon, rest in the dreary routine, rest in the tiresome details that tax our attention and weary our brains, rest in the exacting tasks; amid the stones and the rough places, the disappointments and the trials, the weariness and the loneliness and the uncongenial companionship, there is still rest in Christ, rest at His feet in the attitude of obedience, rest in His heart in the felt assurance of His love and interest—rest in deliverance by His life from the real torment, the torment of self, the agony of self-consciousness, from which no one and nothing else but Christ Himself, and a maintained union with Christ, can ever deliver us.

Look at this week's Collect, and you will find the true attitude: "O Almighty God, Who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto Thy people, that they may love the thing which Thou commandest, and desire that which Thou

Digitized by Google

dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

There is a strange, almost a magical power in the words; their mere utterance seems to give us a sense of rest—to send a breath of air from a higher world. Say them, at any rate this week, till you feel what they mean, till you get on the true path, and see that in the "fixed heart," in the love of God's commandments, in the desire of His promises, in the fellowship with and service of Christ, is the true, one, and only deliverance from torment—the one and only lasting rest.



Digitized by Google

## "UNTO THIS LAST."

"I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own?"—ST. MATT. xx. 14, 15.

IS God perfectly, utterly, entirely just? Is He a Being to Whom we can trust ourselves utterly, Who will misunderstand nothing, misinterpret nothing, Who will see that in the last resort every one has his due, however much appearances may be against him? If He is, we can believe in Him in the highest way, we can trust ourselves to Him; we can bear to grope on in the dark about some things, "to see through a glass darkly," if that one final conviction is there; we can bear to hear of the seeming triumph of injustice if we are certain that the cause of the oppressed is safe with God. We know it is only for a time. We know that the day has come even here and now, in this world, when men have heard God's voice; when "the Lord, even the most mighty God, hath spoken and called the world from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same." We know that He

Digitized by Google

will "judge the world in righteousness;" that there will come a day when no oppression shall remain unpunished, no injustice unremedied, no wrong unrighted. We can bear things even while we groan over them, even while the earth is a "place of darkness and cruel habitations," if we know that the God Who reigns is a God Who is just. But once admit a doubt about that; once imagine it to be possible that a doubt can exist, that a mere insistence on rights like Shylock's could ever find favour in His eyes; much more, once imagine that He could ever utter an "I will do this or that" regardless of right, refusing to listen to remonstrance, strong in the consciousness of His own Almightiness—that He could ever contradict that first and most elementary demand of the soul of man that He should do justice;—once admit it, and all becomes dark and confused, and there is no hold for the feet now or hereafter; the head is dizzy and the heart sick, and we cease to care what we do, and we grow reckless and wicked, and hate God, and hate ourselves, and hate all around us.

This is why it is good to look into a passage that is so startling and so easily misinterpreted as the words before us. They do seem at first sight to savour of injustice; they do seem hard words, cruel words, unjust words, taking no account of hours of hard

Digitized by Google

toil and weary expectation, giving to the last as to the first, to the labourer in the cool twilight for one hour, as to the labourer beneath the burning sun for the twelve, and then meeting the request for some explanation with a peremptory, "Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own?" There is something truly startling here—something that wants looking into, if we are still to believe in that perfectly just God Whom Christ came to declare.

There is, then, an apparent difficulty which needs a little attention to overcome; but the really hard task in meeting such difficulties is only one, viz. to gain the attention of the persons who raise them, for often the explanation is the last thing they care to listen to. And, of course, explanations are often given which explain nothing; *e.g.* this passage has been elaborately explained to mean that those who worked longest had been lazy, and that the last-called had worked so strenuously as to equalize their burden. But there is no hint of such a solution in the root of the parable. If such had been the case, it would have been an easy answer to their statement; but there is no trace of it, no word of disapproval for lazy work. No; we must take it that the first-called had borne the burden and heat of the day, and seek the explanation elsewhere.

The real key to the solution of the difficulty lies

Digitized by Google

in our human ideas of work as being, in some sense, a hardship. As long as these ideas colour our mind we shall never see this parable in its true light. We must dismiss these human ideas of work. To labour in God's vineyard means broadly to fill the place He has sent us to fill in this world. The work is happiness; the absence of it misery. The work in the vineyard is not work of this kind or that, but the carrying out of the object of our existence generally—the object for which our organs and our powers and our natures are fitted. To work in the vineyard is to take the view that life is a service, and to act upon it.

When our Lord came, some were already in possession of this view of life—were labourers in the vineyard. The Jewish Church was quite familiar with the view of life represented by the expression, "labourers in the vineyard." But there were others—the great Gentile world, who had not yet had this great object of life presented to them; who still were asking the question why they were born only to die; who had never been taught that they were meant and fitted for the service of God; who were conscious of vague longings and aspirations, but found no means of fulfilling and satisfying them, and so were standing "idle in the market-place," ready to be hired, but not set to work, because they had not

Digitized by Google

found the object for which they were made. It was not unwillingness to work which kept them idle; it was not their fault that they were not at work—they show that by their attitude. They were standing in the street that at least they might be in the way of being hired; they were not asleep at home or begging in the back street, but there waiting for an opportunity. Their only reason for standing idle at all was, "Because no man hath hired us." That is the key to the parable, which removes all appearance of injustice. Think of some conceivable answers which they might have made. They might have said, "We don't like to work; we earned enough yesterday to keep us to-day." Or they might have said, "We don't work, because wages are too low." Any such answer would have changed the whole tone of the parable; but it was not that. They were waiting to be hired, and when the offer came they made no bargain about the pay; they left that to the master's justice. What they cared for was the work, and not the pay: they had found what life really meant, and so they earned the full reward.

What it comes to is this. God's justice is so great that it will not treat lack of opportunity when there is willingness, as though it were lack of service. God's justice is more equitable than any human justice can be; it can recognize intentions and reward

Digitized by Google

the will to work, the desire to fulfil the object of life, even when opportunity and knowledge does not exist. No employer of human labour could go on for long recognizing the will for the deed, but Divine Justice in its splendid equity can. It can give "to this last," who has been waiting and longing, with a longing unintelligible even to himself, to do something, to fulfil the object of his life, even as unto him to whom opportunity came long ago; it can say that to have to wait for opportunities is not a ground for punishment, but for pity; it can recognize the blind unintelligible desire for that service, which alone gives to life its real meaning, as though it were actual service.

This is the explanation of the apparent injustice of the award. The words really show how God endures any slowness to see, any honest mistakes, anything but *want of will;* they throw back, as it were, a light on some of the darkest shadows of the old world. It seems often so hard to think of the straining eyes of those of old. From that old pagan world there comes back many a cry of waiting aspiration, a longing for deliverance from shadows and emptiness, from the horrid quasi-compulsion to follow the worst while they saw the best which Ovid so mournfully bewails. It seems so hard to have yearned for something better, and to have "died without the sight;" so hard to have longed for the true light, and

Digitized by Google

to have never seen its rising. It was no fault of theirs, of those great spirits of the old world, Æschylus and Sophocles, Plato and Socrates, who speak to us so pathetically of the darkness and woe of the world, of the longings and desires of men "feeling after God, if haply they might find Him," that they died without the sight. There is a deep and moving meaning in the words, "Because no man hath hired us;" they are the moan of the old world groping for its Deliverer. And when He came, when the doors of the kingdom were flung open, then Divine Justice showed its splendid equity. The Gentiles were admitted on equal terms with the favoured race who from their own point of view had borne the burden and heat of the day, who counted their privileges, *i.e.* as a possession, and not as a trust for the sake of others. Then it was shown once and for ever conclusively, and Christ here brings it home to us, that none who ever had lived, or ever would live, would lose anything from lack of opportunity or knowledge if only he had the will, the desire, the longing for His true life; that with God there is neither before nor after, but an ever-ready now to all who seek Him.

This, then, is the first point. This saying, "I will give unto this last even as unto thee," which seems to have a show of injustice about it, is really a witness to the ideal character of Divine Justice—to

Digitized by Google

the way in which it can treat *intentions* as accomplished actions. It answers our difficulties about those who have no opportunity. God will give unto these last—these outcasts, these ignorant, who yet in their sunken state had better longings—He will give unto these last even as unto those who had opportunities of knowledge and service as well as the longings for them. We need not grieve for them; those whom we need fear for are those who, having great and splendid opportunities of the knowledge and service of God, neglect, misuse, or trifle with them. We, at any rate, can never say, "Because no man hath hired us." We are set in the midst of a thousand opportunities, of a thousand wants, of a thousand hands stretched out for help. We cannot say, "No one wants what I can give them."

To us the stirring question arises to-day, "Why stand you here all the day idle?" What are you doing to make the world you live in a better place for others to live in—better in some way religiously, socially, morally, intellectually? There is room in the vineyard for workers of all sorts of effort; but for idlers, for those who fill up their whole time by working for their own profit and advantage alone, for those who live in independence of a necessity to work and spend their lives in selfish pleasure-seeking, there is no room.

Digitized by Google

If Divine Justice will not punish want of opportunity, how must it deal with squandered opportunity, wasted talents, misused influence? Is not the sentence ever going forth behind the veil, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

I told you just now of a service for Church workers this week. I asked for workers to-day and last Sunday in different ways. I wish I could bring it home to your minds that every Church worshipper ought to be in some way or other a worker, even if his daily work by which he gains his livelihood imposes great toils on him. He ought to do something for the Body. I do not say Church worker, because we have not got a wide-enough view about that yet, and that limitation would seem to narrow it; but a worker in some way for the good of mankind apart from his professional labour. That is the Apostolic idea—as every one has a χάρισμα, so every one should have a διακονία. It is not that every one has the same gifts; every one, *e.g.*, could not teach in a Sunday school (a good many might possibly find a more fitting place on the bench of the scholar than on the chair of the teacher), nor could every one embark in the financial intricacies of a treasurer's work; but every one is sent, hired by God, to do something—it is the test of real faith. If you believe in the Church as Christ's Body, you will do something for the other members

Digitized by Google

of the Body. What you do may be very little, but it will sanctify everything else you do, and it will be the centre round which your true life will grow; your prayers will find an object, your life an interest and a fulness, a consecration in some definite thing that you do. I am thankful to feel that many of us know this; that many of you who do not work in connection with us here work elsewhere, and I would not for one moment have it otherwise, for I have again and again refused to take the work of people away from other places. But I would that we had a congregation who were all doing something for the Body, and then we should be real Christians; our worship would be such a reality as it has never been yet. I know what excuses we make about our shyness and dulness and incapacity; but no one who really begins looks back upon their excuses with anything but shame and regret. Just think, we live in the midst of a thousand wants which we might help, and we do nothing.* People who want you are all round. The people who really want you do not come and beg of you. They do not know that they want you; and if you asked them they would say, "I want nothing of you," and perhaps would say it roughly if you were so deficient in taste as to ask such a question. But there are all around, mind you,

* Cf. Phillips Brooks's "Sermon on the Man of Macedonia," p. 97.

Digitized by Google

the unrealized needs of mankind, hidden away, but true and real and deep. To get a sense of them is everything. It is such a support when you are trying to help people, when the hopelessness of ever getting them to understand what you mean comes surging over you and blighting your enthusiasm. Every man who is in earnest about anything has things he cares supremely to help other people to see and to think, ideas he wants to communicate. It is a terrible moment when he becomes convinced that he never can, unless he has got a grip of this, viz. that even if he can never do what he wants to, and get people to hear his message, that still they want him in a thousand ways. A personality that consecrates itself has a hundred means of expression besides its communication of ideas. It is always making bridges between its fulness and the emptiness of those who need it. It is not the people you expect to influence, or even seem to influence, for whom you do most. Christ did more to change the whole life of the woman who was a sinner than He did for St. John—more, I expect, for the Canaanitish woman than for some of the disciples, because the needs of these were so infinitely greater. Get a sense, then of the unexpressed, perhaps unconscious, needs of mankind—a sense of that dumb inarticulate cry rising around you, even where there are no words or looks of conscious wants. Cul-

Digitized by Google

tivate the desire to help others, and the opportunities will come. Do not wait for opportunities, else they will find you barren and empty. It is the open ear, the seeing eye, and the touch between heart and heart that we must cultivate, and we shall never complain again that we are idle "Because no man hath hired us." From all around us a cry comes every day, "Come and help us." A great wail rises up from our brethren who are divided from us by class-feeling; from those to whom no one has found out how to speak; from those who have lost their way, and who look every morning for help, which no one knows how to give; from those who only want, it seems, one friend to give them support in trial and temptation. From everywhere it comes; from parishes, hospitals, east, north, south, and west; from committees, refuges, workhouses, penitentiaries, the cry is still, "Come over and help us." Can it be that we go on making excuses, living for ourselves, using our possessions and talents for ourselves, shut up in our narrow class-feeling, and think to be excused "Because no man hath hired us;" think that because no one comes and forces his need upon us, therefore there are no needs? No needs! Why, you cannot leave your own house without meeting them everywhere! You pass where men and women are tempted to degradation, and as you shun them, out of

Digitized by Google

the remorseful face that seems to mock at you there comes the deeper cry, "Oh, help me to get back, to get out of this hell of remorse!" Or you shrink from roughness, blasphemy, hardness of men; and yet from their very roughness there comes the appeal, "Help me to be my own master, and not the slave of vice, the degraded beast that I feel." Oh, if God would only open our ears to the unconscious wants of mankind around us, if His blessed Spirit would only touch our hearts, what a power might go forth from this Church this morning! May He give us a deepened sense of responsibility for all His gifts, and, as a practical outcome of it, a share in the activities of some Christian enterprise, that we may find our true place in this world of His, and thereby our true training and education for those greater ministries that are awaiting us in the world beyond.

Digitized by Google

## *BALAAM.—I.*

"Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open."—NUM. xxiv. 3, 4.

BALAAM has been well described as "one of the most interesting characters of the Old Dispensation. His home is beyond the Euphrates, among the mountains where the streams that water Mesopotamia have their rise. But his fame is known across the Assyrian desert, through the Arabian tribes, right down to the shores of the Dead Sea. He ranks as a warrior chief (a combination of soldier and prophet already seen in Moses himself) with the five kings of Midian. He is regarded throughout the whole East as a prophet whose blessing or curse is irresistible." * Hence the eagerness of Balak to receive his assistance—an eagerness which finds its parallel in the desire of King John to get the Pope on his side in

* Stanley's "History of the Jewish Church," lecture viii.

Digitized by Google

his struggle with the English people. How he came to have his eyes open, to have visions, to hear words of God, is a mystery; but his position as a Gentile prophet, like that of Gentile Job, shows that the knowledge of the true God did transcend the limits of the Jewish Church, and points to the fact of an inspiration outside the body—a fact which has its lessons now.

So he comes suddenly before us with a brilliant reputation founded upon his prophetical gift, and this much his reputation makes certain—that he must have been a true man in the days before we see him, that in his early struggles his better self had prevailed, and that so far he had overcome. "His eyes were open; he had seen the vision of the Almighty;" therefore we may be quite certain that he had had his earlier struggles, and had overcome opposition and temptation in them. No man sees the vision, no man's eyes are opened without a fierce hard struggle with evil; and Balaam had doubtless proved in that earlier struggle his love of goodness and truth, and had established a reputation for righteousness which made his support an object of primary importance to Balak. "His eyes had been opened"—what a pregnant description it is!—"he has seen visions of the Almighty." He had come, through whatever trial, to see goodness and to love

Digitized by Google

it, and so he comes before us with an unquestioned reputation. Whoever else might make mistakes, might be deceived, might barter away truth for gain, Balaam, the man "whose eyes were open," who had proved his devotion to goodness, would not. And so the hour of his trial came, the hour which was to prove whether he would be true to his early promise or not.

The situation was one of great interest.

I. All through the East, for years the rumour had passed of the Exodus of Israel, of the nation of slaves loosed from the Egyptian power, of the Divine interference, of the mighty army that had perished in the sea. The Lord's great deliverance had been noised abroad; everywhere the hearts of oppressors were filled with fear; everywhere there were dim forebodings of a coming judgment. And Balaam, among others, had heard it all; the man "whose eyes God had opened" knew of it—he knew that God's people were on their way, knew that a greater prophet than himself was coming. We know from his own words that he had heard of it. He knew, and yet he did nothing to help Israel—to help the cause which he "whose eyes were opened" knew to be the cause of goodness and truth. It may have been from unwillingness to leave his home, his ease, his settled position, his great reputation, and to throw in



Digitized by Google

his lot with vagabond wanderers. Whatever the motive, he missed his first great opportunity. The question really was, Did he love truth and goodness enough to go forth and greet Moses and Israel, to welcome God's people? Had that "vision of the Almighty" so possessed his soul that he yearned towards God's people, and would go to learn of them that he might gain their more perfect light? This was the real question, and it was answered only too plainly. Balaam resisted the noble impulse that stirred within him; he would wait and see which way things went; he would not commit himself to a perilous enterprise; they must send for him if they wanted him. And so he stood aloof—stood aloof when the voice was ringing within him, and telling him to go and do all he could for God's people.

But there is no position of neutrality permanently possible for the man "whose eyes are open, who has seen the vision of the Almighty." Others to whom the great struggle and the great vision have not yet come, may stand and wait and look and ponder; but once let the eyes be open to goodness and truth, and delay to champion their side becomes treachery. And so Balak's messenger found him really a traitor in heart already; his opportunity had come already with the news of Israel's arrival, and while he was yet undecided, it had come again. Balak's messenger

Digitized by Google

finds him doubtful, undecided, only certain of one thing—he must not go against God's express command; he still draws the line there. But the neutral position is impossible for the man whose "eyes are open, who has seen the vision." He must take a side; he must do something. "To do nothing; to take no side, for the 'man whose eyes are open,' is to be lost." *

Oh, brethren, Balaam is not the last man by a great many whose eyes are open, but who has tried to shut his eyes to truth and goodness, to the cause of righteousness, because it came in some unpopular fashion—who has refused to take a side because it might land him in difficulties, might offend his supporters, because it came in a sudden fashion without consulting his convenience; who has tried to balance himself in neutrality, and found only too soon in one sense, and too late in another, that to hesitate when the course is clear is to be lost, and to shut one's eyes and be neutral when God's cause is advancing, is to be, sooner or later, inevitably a traitor. Doing nothing shuts the way. Hearty love of truth is on the alert; it early asks of a cause, not, "Is it popular?" but "Is it just and right?" It is glad when it catches the rumour of victorious life and surrounding death;

* Cf. Thring's "Sermons," No. lxi. p. 329. I owe many of the thoughts about Balaam's character to this sermon.

Digitized by Google

it hastens to take its share. "To do nothing when the eyes are open is to be lost."

It is a great prayer, "Lord, open my eyes that I may see"—see truth and goodness and all they involve; see the great sights of the spiritual world, "the chariots and horses round about," all sacred causes. But there is another prayer: that we may have the grace not only to see, to visualize those things that be good, but by God's merciful guidance to perform the same, which is doubly and trebly necessary.

And so Balak's messengers came across the whole length of the Assyrian desert with rewards of divination in their hands to tempt Balaam. They had only one object in view—to get the influence of Balaam, his unquestioned religious character and reputation, on their side. They had no belief in his principles, but they had in his reputation. They were like some astute modern politician who invokes the religious principle, though he secretly despises all religions as unworthy of a sensible man, yet who knows that religious principle is still a power.

So they were shrewd judges of the situation. They argue that so famous a man as Balaam cannot go on doing nothing; he must face the question. He cannot be neutral in the face of the powerful nation; he must take a side, and at any rate it is worth while to try if he will not take theirs; and so they come

Digitized by Google

and ask him to curse the people of God. And Balaam's conduct shows where he has got to already. Instead of meeting them with the scorn of an honest man "whose eyes are open," with the firm refusal of a man who has deep convictions, he asks them to stay the night; he will inquire. His heart has gone out already to the rewards of divination, and the heart that hankers after riches and honours cannot be harmonized with the "open eyes" and the clear vision. The temptation, no doubt, is great. On the one side there is the wilderness, the sharing of the anxieties and hardships of Israel, the wrath and enmity of Balak; on the other hand there is the splendid position in the "house full of silver and gold" of the king, the assured honour, the great position. And so Balaam spent a night of torturing indecision, "letting I dare not wait upon I would." He was a prophet, and therefore he knew too much to really imagine that he could do anything against God; he shows that by repeating again and again that he will do nothing against Him. And yet he could not bring himself to sacrifice Balak's friendship by taking God's part heartily. He took refuge in the plausible yet self-deceiving attitude of doing nothing. God's answer to him came clear and distinct, "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed." God's answer gave

Digitized by Google

him all the direction he wanted, though it only told him what he knew before. It was a great warning—great because it re-echoed the voice of his earlier conscience. It ought to have settled the question for ever with Balaam; it ought to have sent him straight into the arms of Israel, their pioneer in that strange land; it was a grand opportunity, the one last chance so often given before the downward plunge is taken. How did Balaam receive it? Like a man whose heart goes one way and his words another. "The Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you," *i.e.* "I would if I could, but I dare not; I have not the courage to disobey a positive command." No doubt that answer gave Balak's messengers much encouragement. They go back and tell the king that the great prophet, the man "whose eyes are open," the spiritual champion, is really on his side. He only wants a little pressing; some ridiculous scruples are hindering him, but he will come round. Ah! if Balaam had only been true even then, what misery might have been saved; if he had only taken the last chance, and set off to join Israel as soon as the messengers had gone! But it was not to be. "The Lord refuseth to let me curse the cause of truth and goodness." That was his temper; it shows that the heart of Balaam was on the side of God's enemies. It is the end of the first scene. It leaves him with a

Digitized by Google

positive order not to go with Balak, with a clear word of guidance—that "the people were blessed;" it leaves him with time, while Balak's messengers were on their way back, to think this over—time to pause and review the situation, time to look straight at what he was really doing. Alas! too, it leaves him knowing, as a man "whose eyes are open" only can know where right was, but doing nothing to help the right.

Ah! that last chance, that breathing-time before the second stage begins, when the man "whose eyes are open" is hesitating and balancing arguments to see how far he can safely go—what a time it is, fruitful of what endless possibilities for good or evil! There is God's cause, an opening, an opportunity; an occasion, it may be, for some public declaration on the side of what he knows to be the side of right and justice, or it may be some work to be undertaken to help on a great cause, some occasion of showing one's sympathies with the weak and afflicted. And everything is crying out to one, God's voice is ringing within, the rush of living truth and goodness is about one, and still we pause and falter and hesitate and criticize, and sit, as it were, on the hedge and wait to see how things will turn out; still there is the vision, the haunting vision of the wrath of some pigmy Balak, the fear of ridicule or of the loss of promotion, or the longing desire for "the house full

Digitized by Google

of silver and gold," the signs of the heart that can see "how goodly are the tents of Israel," and yet is really set upon the tempting rewards of a wavering policy, and will only not do evil because "the Lord refuseth" to allow it.

II. No man stops here long, nor did Balaam. A different level begins; he is allowed to have his own way, he is left to act for himself. This is always God's way, for God wants our hearts, and not merely our words, and if He sees we will not, when "our eyes are open," give Him our hearts, He lets us buy a bitter experience of what evil is and what it comes to. So God, seeing that his heart is with Moab, tells him to go, but still warns him as he goes. And so he sets out for the tempter's house. And consider what that means. It means that in the sight of men he was Balak's helper, his ally. Where *one* would hear his protest, "only what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak," a thousand would note the fact that the man "whose eyes were open," the man with high reputation for goodness, was living as Balak's guest. And so "God's anger was kindled because he went." How could a righteous God's anger not be kindled at this shuffling spirit? Remember, Balaam knew that Israel was God's people, knew that Balak desired above all things their extermination, and yet he goes to be a guest at Balak's house.

Digitized by Google

If he went at all, knowing what he did, surely in all honesty he must say to Balak that he was fighting against God, and warn him of the terrible consequences of such a warfare. And so to warn him the angel of the Lord with his drawn sword stood in the way to withstand him, to bring home the danger of góing, the peril of disobeying the earlier commandment. To warn him came the awful apparition which he had blinded his eyes so that he could not see. Mark the moral deterioration that had set in; the spiritual vision of the man "whose eyes are open" is duller than that of a dumb animal. Warning after warning came to him on the road, to help him to do the much harder thing than to help Moses that now lay before him, viz. boldly to rebuke Balak, to tell him that he was fighting against God. Such warnings do come to men by a thousand avenues. Now it is through some dream, some midnight apparition; now through some apparent accident, or some strange out-of-the-way occurrence. Again and again those who note such things see how little things, or very ordinary things, as well as strange things, fit in with our lives for good or evil. "The dumb ass, the common daily familiar helper, speaks in some unusual way, out of the everyday routine, out of unexpected quarters;"* from the mouth of

* Robertson's "Sermons," vol. i. p. 336

Digitized by Google

some one we despise "comes the voice that warns or cheers us, or a series of things each of which by itself is nothing, follows in so subtle a connection as to convince every one that they are voices sent by God," that in truth "the dumb ass is speaking." Often people will not recognize this; often they contemptuously refuse to see what they do not wish to see. But the fact remains. And even the most thoughtless men are sometimes startled by the strange concurrence of apparently casual events. The wise ponder these things, and use them for guidance or warning. Often, too, the heedless and reckless, like Balaam, are obliged to shape their course by such events. They cannot help it; the drawn sword of irresistible calamity is in front of them, the path is narrow, and they are forced to stop and consider whither they are going. Surely Balaam's experience is a very typical one. God allows men to have their own way; He will not force them into goodness, but still He sends His messengers in some shape or other. Every day "the dumb ass" in some way is made to speak and to "rebuke the madness of the prophet." Even if God lets you start on the downward road because you have no love of goodness within you, and will not obey the earlier command, He will yet, in a thousand ways from unexpected quarters, by lower or inanimate creatures, try to move you to stop and think where you are going to.

Digitized by Google

So ends the second great scene in Balaam's downfall. The story of his meeting with Balak and of his final fall must occupy us next Sunday. To-day let us note the earlier lesson. The man "whose eyes are open" began by thinking, not of the call of truth and duty, but of his own comfort and ease. He would not champion the cause of God's people, for the sake of God's glory; he preferred his own fireside. When he does leave his house, it is at the call of God's enemies. Even then, all is not over. Though he is well on the downward road, he is still warned; he can still be moved to reflection; he can yet take the true and honest course; he can yet tell Balak the truth; he can yet save himself. The wilful course, once really chosen, must run its course and come to its own issue; there is no going back at this point. Yet at the bottom, in Balak's very house, there is one last opportunity of a noble stand for truth and a brave witness for goodness. So it ever is; God lets you go if you will not give Him your heart—lets you go only that you may find yourself amid a thousand warnings, "the sword in the way, the dumb ass speaking." A thousand warnings come to you from those you despise, from irresistible calamity; for there is still hope that at the last you may be true and retrieve something of your trust by a noble protest. Surely when trouble comes, when you are conscious

Digitized by Google

of having slipped downwards, it is well to remember this. Though nothing can bring back the earlier opportunity, nothing can undo the fact that when active good was moving round you—when the living moving power of truth and goodness was calling you—you stood still and hesitated and waited, and balanced your duty against inclination, till the time went by and your best opportunity went with it, yet these warnings mean that there is another opportunity. God has not left you; you can still obey Him, though it be only by the difficult course of a resolute protest in Balak's very house.

The great enduring lesson of it all is, "Keep thy heart diligently, for out of it are all the issues of life." Balaam had not kept his heart. He loved the lower things. It is not what you do so much as what you long for, that is the key to your future. It is not merely the question whether your eyes are open, whether you have "seen the vision of the Almighty," whether, *i.e.* your religious principles are clear, whether you have no doubts on these questions; it is whether you love goodness, whether your sympathy is with struggling good everywhere, whether you will leave your comforts to go and help Moses and Israel because you know that theirs is the cause of goodness and truth, or whether you are afraid of committing yourself; it is whether you, who have leisure, will give

Digitized by Google

some of that leisure to some useful work, or whether you are afraid of interfering with your pleasures; it is whether you will use your money as a trust and see how much you can give to God's cause, or keep it for your own pleasure, or hoard it up to keep your children in an idleness that will probably be their curse and their ruin; above all, it is whether you will take the side of good as it comes to you, wherever you come across it, in public life, in social life, in the issues that are raised around you, or whether your secret sympathies are all the time with evil, whether you are hankering after the splendour of Balak's court, or the splendid position of Balak's prophet. It is one of the noblest utterances of modern poetry, "We needs must love the highest when we see it." But, alas! we may lose the power of seeing it. For only "the pure in heart" can see God. For the man "whose eyes are open," who has once seen truth and goodness, there can be but one course to clear his heart daily, hourly, from all sympathy with evil—to bend his whole energies that he may be so pure in heart as to see goodness wherever it may be manifested, and, having seen it, that his whole heart may go out to it with all its intensity, whether it be to share its struggling fortunes or to own its unquestioned sway.

Digitized by Google

## *BALAAM.—II.*

"Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"—NUM. xxiii. 10.

WE followed Balaam last Sunday from his first great opportunity of being the pioneer of Israel, through the long and memorable journey with its double warning which ended at Balak's court. We saw that there was one last chance left for him, the one chance of being true—of bearing a faithful witness in the midst of Balak's host. There was this still before him when the angel bade him continue his journey; or, on the other hand, ruin—ruin, hopeless and irretrievable. And time was given him to face the alternative; time, as he rode along, to think over the warnings; time when he came to the city of Arnon, and waited for Balak's coming; time before each new altar; at each new attempt in the quiet evenings and early mornings he had time to pause and think. What a drama of strange misgivings and contrary desires

Digitized by Google

must have been enacted within him in these quiet times! On the one side there was the dream of avarice, the coveted reputation; and on the other, the memory, which nothing could efface, of the vision of God, the music of the voice from heaven, strange, entrancing, ineffable—of the vision of the Almighty, *i.e.* of truth and goodness itself.

And thus, torn two ways, he meets Balak, and the pathos of that inward struggle continues through each successive interview. It is a strange scene all through, when Balak and Balaam meet. "Sometimes one only, sometimes both together, are seen striving to overpower the voice of conscience and of God with the fumes of sacrifice," to make wrong into right by religious observances—a course which the prophet had himself at the outset declared to be vain. The scene has been well traced by a poetic pen. "The eye follows the two as they climb upward from height to height along the extended range to the high places dedicated to Baal on the top of the rocks, the bare hill close above it, the cultivated field on the top of Pisgah, to the peak where stood the sanctuary of Peor, that looketh towards the waste;"* from one scene to another they surveyed the tents of Israel, tried to overcome the inward sense that this nation was unlike all other nations,

* Stanley's "History of the Jewish Church," p. 171.

Digitized by Google

"A people which shall dwell alone, and not be numbered among the nations;" too numberless to give Balak any hope in the coming struggle, and so he bursts out, "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" And yet again he witnesses that it is a nation too strong in righteousness for any enchantments to have power over it. "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." It is a startling scene, and at this point the poet has caught it:

"O for a sculptor's hand,
That thou might'st take thy stand,
Thy wild hair floating on the eastern breeze,
Thy tranc'd yet open gaze
Fix'd on the desert haze,
As one who deep in heaven some airy pageant sees.

In outline dim and vast
Their fearful shadows cast
The giant forms of empires on their way
To ruin: one by one
They tower and they are gone,
Yet in the Prophet's soul the dreams of avarice stay.

No sun or star so bright
In all the world of light
That they should draw to heaven his downward eye:
He hears th' Almighty's word,
He sees the angel's sword,
Yet low upon the earth his heart and treasure lie." *

And yet, in spite of his grovelling heart, what a vision met his eye from the top of Pisgah! He sees

* Keble, "Christian Year," Second Sunday after Easter.

Digitized by Google

the tents of Israel, the rocks, the distant hills. The forms remain, but behind the forms he sees the great realities of the future unfolding themselves in dim succession; he sees and describes with magic eloquence, from the midst of Israel's encampment, streams as of water flowing over the valley, giving life to the dry desert and to the salt sea. "He sees a form like that of a mighty lion crouched among the thickets of Judah, and none shall raise him up; or the wild bull raging from amidst the archers of Ephraim, trampling down his enemies, piercing them through with the well-known arrows of the tribe. And yet again in the distant future he saw, but not now; beheld, but not nigh; saw as with the intuition of his Chaldean art, 'a Star come out of Jacob, and a Sceptre like the shepherd's staff that marked the ruler of the tribe rise out of Israel;' and then, as he watched the course of surrounding nations, he saw them one by one falling, ever falling, as fall they did, before the conquering sceptre of David, before the advance of the Star that rose out of Bethlehem. And as he gazed the vision grew wider still. He saw a time when a new tempest would break over all these countries alike from the remote East, from Assur, *i.e.* from his own native land of Assyria, saw the great Assyrian invasion. And yet as he saw it, another scene opens before him, and a cry of horror



Digitized by Google

burst from his lips. 'Alas! who shall live when God doeth this?' For his own nation, too, was at last to be overtaken. 'Yes, ships shall come from the coast of Chittim,' *i.e.* from the island of Cyprus (which, as the one visible from the heights of Palestine, was the one familiar link with the Western world), and shall crush Assur, and shall crush Eber, the people beyond the Euphrates, and he shall perish for ever." *

It is a strange and weird indication, the first that we meet with, of the rise of the power of Greece and Europe; the first apprehension of the day when Eastern conquest would be rolled back, and at last would come a power before which Assyria and Babylon and Persia would fade and perish for ever from the earth.

It is a wonderful instance, too, of the irresistible force of prophetic impulse overpowering the baser spirit of individual man. We have instances of the same kind now elsewhere in some of the poets. Some of the most noble and living utterances that have described the indescribable have come from men whose hearts were depraved and their lives sordid; the force of genius or power of conscience has conquered the resistance of the earth-bound spirit. There are few nobler flights of feeling than are exhibited in the twenty-fourth chapter of Numbers; few

* Stanley's "History of the Jewish Church," p. 173.

Digitized by Google

more exquisite bursts of passionate desire than that in verse 10, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his;" few more piteous warnings than the brief record which tells us, a few chapters further on, how Balaam, having failed to stifle his prophetic conscience and to curse Israel, tried to poison Israel's heart by infecting them with the licentious rites of Arabian tribes, and met with a dishonoured grave in the war of vengeance that followed.

Let us dwell on one or two of the salient features of this combination in one character of apparent opposites.

I. Observe how even for the man who has "seen the vision of the Almighty," who in his words can express so plainly the rule about the immutability of God, "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it?"—how, being quite certain about that theoretically, yet he never sees that, if that is the case, "blessing and cursing cannot be mere acts of favouritism or caprice." * In spite of knowing this so well, Balaam treats God as one Who might be bribed by sacrifices and coaxed by prayers, to turn wrong into right, and right into wrong. He thinks that God makes right

* Thring, vol. i. p. 339.

Digitized by Google

to be right and wrong to be wrong, and that he might somehow induce Him to change His mind, and so he goes from place to place, from one mountain-top to another, to try to influence Him, to bind Him.

What Balaam had not grasped is the truth declared in to-day's Epistle, that with God is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Right is right, and, if one must put it so crudely, even God could not change wrong into right if He would. God wills right because it is right; once get hold of that, and you will never try to appease God by religious observances, by going to Church or giving money to good objects, that you may induce Him to look over your past transgressions. It would be hard to say how much mischief misrepresentation on this subject has caused. Language is often used which implies, and practices are often allowed in the Christian Church which rest upon the assumption that God made good to be good and evil to be evil; and, consequently, that He can be bought off, and induced to view transgressions in a benign fashion. It is falsehoods like this that have made the idea of God's personality difficult for some minds, and led them to take refuge in such an impersonal definition of God as "a stream of tendency that makes for righteousness." The Bible is very clear about one thing—that right and wrong are no mere questions of

Digitized by Google

will and desire; that it is not that God will not change them, but that even God cannot change them. Of course, a large portion of Christendom by its practise of dispensations has obscured this question, and there are numbers among ourselves who have suffered from the loss of moral distinctness in which that practice has involved men. From the duty of doing what is right *per se* no power in heaven or earth can dispense; if things are wrong in themselves no papal decree can make them right. Might does not make right, and all modes of thinking, all systems that leave a shadow of a doubt upon us on that matter, do us a cruel injury. We shall go like Balaam from one height to another—from church to chapel, from chapel to some wandering moralist, and try to wring a blessing out of them on our favourite transgressions; but no blessing that they can give, nor even any sense of performed observances, will really give rest to the heart that hankers after evil. Nothing can but a resolute protest, nothing can but a stern resistance to evil—a protest and a resistance that alike must be founded on the conviction that the Eternal Mind can never change or be changed about right and wrong, and that it is nothing short of blasphemy to think that it can. There is no way of destroying the cause of God or the sense of His claims upon one's self so fatal as admitting a doubt about this. We are

Digitized by Google

familiar in these days with a type of character which has become, as it considers and is never tired of stating, thoroughly emancipated from old-world superstitions and prejudices—a type imported to England from beyond the seas, which only succeeds very awkwardly, with many inconveniences, in making for itself a nest here. For those who have been nurtured in narrow systems and in homes in which an easy recurrence to prejudices took the place of moral training, this type of character may be for a time attractive; it may have the charm that belongs to a new sensation. It seems so free, so untrammelled. It is not till you become familiarized enough with it to see that it has counted all elementary notions of right and wrong along with other things as a kind of superfluous cargo which it could throw overboard, and that its obvious moral flaws and intellectual insincerities are its new shipments, that you get to its real bottom. Then a few respectable prejudices become a welcome relief, as affording one some foothold in the general intangibility and mistiness which this type of character introduces. Prejudices are of course in themselves an evil, but it has been well pointed out before now how prejudices are often bound up with the most valuable elements in character and life, and how a violent surgery which aims only at eradicating a false

Digitized by Google

opinion, often fatally bruises a true and wholesome feeling which clings to it. Better cling to the most unreasoning of prejudices if conscience tells us that they belong to Eternal Righteousness—and often the substance of them does, though the form may be defective—better so than be ever so enlightened and untrammelled, and learn to treat right and wrong as purely relative things, learn to think that God can ever be moved by mere artifices to bless evil, or that what is wrong in His eyes can ever cease to be wrong.

It has been well said * that there are two cardinal points in the sphere of moral action, liberty and duty, just as there are two cardinal points in the sphere of thought, criticism and belief. Every man has his bias towards one or the other, and the only way of preserving his balance is the old rule, *μέμνησο ἀπιστεῖν*, "distrust your bias." If Balaam had acted upon his sense of duty instead of beating about in order to find a place from which he could curse Israel, he would have been a better man and a happier one too. We can see that as we look back; it only remains to prove the truth of it in ourselves.

II. And to go for a moment into the depths of the man and see the real jar, the twist that is in him. He is not true all through this interview with

* J. Morley's Essays.

Digitized by Google

Balak; he is too full of protest. "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold." We hear it too often. It does not make a man true if he tells or intends to tell no lie. The only real truth is truth in feeling; mere accurate utterance of false feelings is not real truth. And the only man who feels all that is true in life and art and literature as well as in duty and religion, is the man who sets himself to work resolutely by the grace of God to feel it. If he goes from one point of view to another, trying to escape the conviction that is forcing itself upon him, the insistence of some unwelcome duty; if he goes from one point to another, from a hill where he sees the whole of Israel to a hill where Israel may look in a different light, he only succeeds, not so much in hiding the truth from himself, as in making himself incapable of feeling what is true.

And this it is that makes some men such unjust, unfair critics. How seldom, alas! do you find men who have enough feeling about what is true to enable them to take broad generous views of anything; the events of the hour, the books of the day, the characters of their neighbours! Some inward flaw, some moral repulsion, some underlying falseness vitiates the judgment. It may be anything, from a want of generosity to a pitiful craving for popularity, or a cowardly fear of not worshipping the idols of

Digitized by Google

the day. But it makes them blear-eyed; it leads men to suggest evil motives, to try to curse good by saying that part of it is done for appearances, or by insinuating that, if all was known, it would be found to be a sham. Like Balaam, such men hunt from hill to hill to find a place whence they may see one blot in character or the utmost corner of wrong, and fasten their misrepresentations and calumnies on a partial half-view and fix a curse on it in this way. The whole may not be easy to blacken, but every cause and every man has parts, taken by themselves, which lend themselves to criticism, as either weaknesses or perhaps really imperfect work which circumstances compel the worker to do; and the man who has no feeling for what is true, fastens on this, Balaam-like. He has no eye for a great cause or a great work, but a good eye for a blot; like a vulture he scents the carrion, he beats about in order to curse; his whole view becomes poisoned even while he asseverates again and again his utter truthfulness. Surely in days like these the lesson is needed. By such criticisms, by such vulture-work, numbers of men and women gain reputations which may give them certain thrills of satisfaction, but they do so, like Balaam, at the price of all that makes life worth having; they do so at the price of that sense of truth, of that feeling about what is true, which is destroyed

Digitized by Google

by nothing so much as by unfair judgments hastily formed.

And though these judgments hurt others, it always needs to be remembered that they hurt nobody else as much as they do those that utter them. A tone of superiority in unfair and hard condemnation, a sort of editorial "we," is the most deceptive thing in the world. The judgment formed from mere prejudice, the outcome of a mental twist, may injure others, but it injures nobody like the utterer; it confirms him fatally in his injustice, it blunts his entire feeling about what is true.

"The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore the light within thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

The lesson of Balaam's life is simple enough. You may not have his splendid powers, or his dramatic opportunities, but his temptation is an ever-recurrent one. Bribes are not always offered in money; they may take other forms less material, but equally hateful. You may barter your sense of truth for pitiful popularity, or from mere nervous cowardice. You may join the chorus that chants the praise of the beast in every generation, by worshipping the idols of the day, because you won't take the trouble to think, to pray, to wait till you see "the vision of the Almighty." There is only one safety. If once

Digitized by Google

you have got this vision, if once you have got a clear perception of any great truth and of God's way of working by it in the world, cling to it, absorb yourself in it. Above all, do not think you have done enough when you have not actively opposed God's cause. Watch for opportunities of being faithful; be earnest in pursuing these when they come. It is the man who is true to what he knows, who carries it out in active work for good causes, come weal, come woe, who alone can look forward and say with no insincerity, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Digitized by Google

# *PRAYER.—I.*

## THE TRUE CONCEPTION OF PRAYER.

"And it came to pass, that, as Jesus was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray."—ST. LUKE xi. 1.

SOME years ago, but within the recollection of some of us, a proposal was made by certain well-known scientific Professors, to bring the efficacy of prayer for temporal relief to what they avowed to be an accurate and decisive test. They proposed, if I remember rightly, that a certain ward in a hospital should have its patients prayed for by religious persons, and that certain other wards should be left out and that the relative result as regards health should be taken to be decisive of the question. Not that they professed to be in any doubt about the result of their proposed experiment. They had proved from facts and figures at their command that the world is governed by fixed laws, which, so far as can be seen, are invariable, and that under such laws there is no

Digitized by Google

room for prayer, and no possibility for such answers to it as it presupposes.

The proposal, I have no doubt, was made in perfect good faith, but it was one which obviously could not be accepted. To subject so sacred a thing as the communion of man with God to a process of verification by statistics (such as might be applicable to the ravages of infectious disease), would be felt by every one who believed in God to be irreverent in the highest degree. It would be to seek a sign in the very way that our Lord again and again condemned. It would be impossible to put one's self in an attitude of reverent prayer, with the intention of proving the power of the Divine Being to answer it; it would strike a fatal blow at any real belief in God at all. But I am not sure that this proposal, distasteful as it seems, has not been productive of much good in forcing men to face what they meant by conventional language on this subject, and in giving us a larger and truer conception of what prayer is. Every suggestion, however unfriendly, that leads you to be less mechanical in your religion—to think more what traditional expressions, what religious acts mean, is in itself a thing to be thankful for; and certainly any suggestion which helps to clear up our minds about so great and important a subject as prayer, ought to be welcomed for its tendency, what-

Digitized by Google

ever objection its particular form may be open to. If we pass on to ask the question, How was such a misconception possible? I am afraid the answer would be, From the loose and inaccurate language which Christians have often used concerning prayer. Prayer had come to be synonymous with asking God for things; a meeting for prayer was a meeting for specific requests. Now, the Bible idea of prayer is primarily that it is a means of communion with God, and only very secondarily that it is the making of particular requests. Yet the ordinary idea of prayer, which is put forward is that it is the demanding certain definite and calculable gifts—the asking for what we want and have not, and only secondarily that it is communion with God. And it is only through the dangerous prominence given to the subordinate and consequential idea of asking for particular things, that a misapprehension like the one I referred to could and did arise. Any one who tries to think the question out, even a little way, must see that a theory of prayer such as is sometimes taught as the Christian theory, takes away the world from under God's rule, and places it at the mercy of man's variable and conflicting desires. It involves all sorts of absurdities, *e.g.* that two men may make contrary requests at the same time, and both get what they ask. It is impossible to conceive anything more

Digitized by Google

mischievous than the tendency of such teaching; nor can those be fairly blamed who exposed the absurdity of such a conception.

Because, however, such misconceptions are often current even now, and because of the transcendent importance of a right view of prayer, I ask you to go a little deeply into the whole question this morning.

I. The fundamental conception of Prayer, as put before us in the Bible, has not the offering of any sort of specific petitions at its root; it is rather an attitude of the spiritual nature seeking for God, rising into communion with Him. This is the highest function of prayer; this is the view of prayer which even the Old Testament presents to us. What it calls prayers are primarily not specific petitions, but efforts after closer communion with God, *e.g.* the Psalms are called the prayers of the Son of Jesse;* the song of Hannah is called a prayer; so is the third chapter of Habakkuk, which is more a religious poem than a prayer. And these psalms and songs are very far from being prayers in the sense of mere petitions. Hannah's prayer is simply a rejoicing in God—a song of gladness. The Psalms are full of every human emotion; they dwell on human life as a whole viewed from the Divine stand-

* Cf. *Expositor*, vol. v. p. 325, where the whole subject is admirably worked out.

Digitized by Google

point; they try to track out God's way; they offer before God, sorrow, contrition, vows of dedication, the most varied and sustained praise; they are full now of reverence, now of intense longing, now of rapture. And yet they are prayers, though often there is but little direct appeal in them. They are a devout thinking about God, a trying to think with Him, a kindling of thought under the light of His Presence. Take the prayer of Habakkuk: "The mountains saw Thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered His voice, and lifted up His hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation; at the light of Thine arrows they went, and at the shining of Thy glittering spear. . . . Thou didst walk through the sea with Thine horses, through the heap of great waters." As he reveals this splendid manifestation of God, the prophet resolves that, come what may, he will trust in God, and entreats Him to continue His work of Redemption. And this sublime poetry, which contains only this one petition, is called a prayer.

I might go through other instances in the Old Testament, but I pass on to what more immediately concerns us—the prayers of our Lord Himself.

Now, that Christ, "in the days of His Flesh, offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" is a fact attested by the apostles them-

Digitized by Google

selves. He prayed whole nights. He prayed especially for Simon. He asks in the Agony for the Cup to pass from Him. The element of definite request, the supplication for specific objects, is undoubtedly present in His Prayers. But is it the most prominent element? When we consider His longer and more sustained prayers, above all, His great intercessory Prayer in St. John xvii., we get a different conception. Undoubtedly there are many direct petitions. The Son asks much of the Father—asks for Himself that "He may be glorified;" for the disciples that "they may be kept from the world and sanctified through the truth," and that "all who believe through them may be one." But the most lasting impression that this prayer makes in us is, that we have been listening, not to petition, but to the highest kind of meditation—the communing of the Son with the Father; the Son is in the Presence of the Father, speaking with the Father; of His own Work, how He shall finish it, of its issues. The words of the prayer are a revelation, an interpretation of the Master's Work and Life, to which the disciples were privileged to listen. They learnt from it what He had done for them—what He willed to do for them and the world; "in His perfected Work lies the consecration of humanity." * It is at once a prayer and

* Westcott's "Commentary on St. John," ch. xvii.



Digitized by Google

a Revelation. Take, again, the Lord's Prayer. It is a model for prayer in its form and in its substance. It has, no doubt, the petitionary form throughout, but it is petition never for individual needs, and only once for any outward good. Compare the Lord's Prayer with any of the books of family prayers which used to make, in the days of our childhood, the breakfast-bell a knell of gloom to us—those prayers which combined the giving to God elaborate information about Himself and ourselves with a whining tone of almost mendicancy and a selfish accentuation of personal needs. Compare the Lord's Prayer with the prayer about the cholera used in my recollection in our Churches, in which we contented ourselves with beseeching God, the Father of all, to "keep it far from our coasts;" let the rest of the world perish so long as our coasts are clear of peril—the typical spirit of the prosperous Englishman reflected in his devotions. Contrast, I say, the Lord's Prayer with these effusions, and you are in a different region. What does the Lord teach us to ask in His Prayer? That God may be known and loved; that He may reign in kingdoms, *i.e.* in political and state affairs as well as in the moral and religious lives of men; that God's Will may be done;—these are petitions that breathe no personal solicitations. And the one temporal need we carry to the Throne of Grace, *i.e.* the

Digitized by Google

prayer for daily bread, is for the simplest necessity, the food without which we should die, the bread for subsistence, τὸν ἄρτον τὸν ἐπιούσιον; and even that solitary petition is redeemed from all selfishness by its very wording, "Give us,"—since we must ask for our neighbours' together with our own; even that petition must be ruled by the earlier ones, "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth;" even in asking for bread we profess our willingness to go without, *i.e.* to die, if by dying we may help to hallow the Name and advance the cause of God. With these examples before us of New Testament prayers—and they might be immensely increased by considering the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis, by examining the prayers of the Apostles—it is impossible that we should stoop to the vulgar and degraded conception of prayer (which current manuals of family prayers have been largely responsible for introducing) as simply an insisting on a supply of our real or imagined wants. Prayer is rather the moving forth of our higher nature, of our faculties and affection towards God, as our Home, our Rest, our Joy. We may pray most really without any words or asking anything—kneeling simply alone before God, wrapt in thought of Him Who is and loves. For the essence of prayer is not asking, but communion and intercourse with the Father of our

Digitized by Google

spirits; and so prayer reflects all the varying emotions of the soul, as much its lofty moments of rapture and its quiet moments of contemplation as its earnest and deep-toned cry for help.

If there had been this wide view, this full and grand conception kept alive in the Church, we should never have heard of proposals which assume that prayer is a mere asking for definite gifts; we should not have heard the sneering description that prayer is a "machine warranted by theologians to make God do what He does not want to do, but what His clients want." Such a sneer would have had no power if the more philosophical, the more spiritual, the more Biblical conception of prayer as communion with God had been more widely current. After all, such a misrepresentation has not much force as it is; for the prayers that ask most directly, recognize as a truism that we must not insist on receiving the very things we ask for, that there is the submission to God's Will in the background.

But is the prayer that is real asking ever left unanswered? God forbid we should think so. It is one thing, though, to believe that no prayer is unanswered, and another to believe that we can always recognize the answer.

For so it was, to begin with, as regards the highest of all prayers. Christ prayed that the Cup might

Digitized by Google

pass from Him, and it did not pass. Was the prayer unanswered? Surely it was answered in the angel strengthening Him. St. Paul, again, thrice besought that "the thorn in the flesh might depart," yet he was left to endure unrelieved. But he was given so much help that he rejoiced in his infirmity. Surely God gives not what we ask, but what He knows to be best; gives not what we ask in our blindness, but good things, or, as it is in St. Luke, His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. No real prayer, even for personal needs, ever fails of an answer; but we all need to watch our prayers and our desires, too, which are unexpressed prayers. We know not what we ask when we ask for some one's life, that he may have time to repent; we may be only asking for opportunity for some deeper sin than ever had been committed before, or for some awful suffering or weakness due to physical causes. If death be an evil in itself, it may be, often no doubt is, a deliverance from worse evils.

Prayer is a great engine. If it does not change natural laws, it undoubtedly does change us to an increasing likeness to God, and gives us an increased power over all we come in contact with; it does diminish the power of evil spirits; it hinders "him that opposeth;" it creates an atmosphere in which evil is powerless. To pray well, it is a great secret;

Digitized by Google

to pray without ceasing, *i.e.* so to tune desire according to God's Will, it is possible even in a busy life. But only a high ideal of prayer will help us to this. Prayer is to think of God, to meditate on His character, on His relations to men; prayer is to think of our life and plans before God; prayer is to pour out our soul in self-dedication, to tune our weak wills with His Righteous Will; or prayer is a rapturous outburst of grateful song, a contemplation of His goodness. It is all this, and more than this. Do not narrow it to a cold and formal recitation of what we want, or think we want, or even to a querulous and whining lamentation over our shortcomings, expressed in language which often breathes a kind of perpetual suspicion about God's reluctance to supply our needs and strengthen our hearts.

Surely, if we so limit our prayers, we have much to answer for; we cause the world to misunderstand and to deride prayer. Never till we learn to say, "Lord, teach us to pray," never till we rise to live as well as to say the Lord's Prayer, shall we put efficacy of prayer to a decisive test; never till we arrive at the highest conception of it, not as mere asking, but thinking with God in such a way as to turn our desires into His, to aspire till we become one with Him, shall we find the full power and blessedness of prayer.

Digitized by Google

## *PRAYER.—II.*

## THE REASONABLENESS OF PRAYER.

"And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."—ST. LUKE xi. 1.

LAST Sunday I tried to bring before you the true idea of prayer as set forth in the Bible as communion with God, and only in a secondary and subordinate degree the asking for specific things; and no doubt this conception of prayer does much to dispose of false tests of the value of prayer when they are proposed to us, and to help us to discard the merely mechanical view of prayer as an asking for what we want. But there is still room for doubt and misgiving on the subject, and these doubts and misgivings are widely felt around us, even by those who wish to think truly and reverently of God. Granted, they would say, that the popular conception of prayer is defective; granted that prayer is primarily the

Digitized by Google

outgoing of the whole nature towards God, the communion of the child with the Father, and not the mere asking for what you have not and want to get; granted that the element of petition in any true idea of prayer is secondary and subordinate, yet it has a place. Even in the Lord's Prayer you do ask daily bread for yourself and others, and Christ tells you, among other things about prayer, some which point to direct and specific petition, "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Every one that asketh receiveth." However secondary and subordinate and consequential this element of specific request may be in prayer, it is there, and you cannot escape the difficulties with which modern science confronts the idea that underlies any petition to God that He would change things at all; you cannot escape the difficulties that men feel who have studied the universe sufficiently to recognize the reign of law everywhere, and have further discovered that the reign of law is on the whole and in the end beneficent—for the best, as we say—merely by saying that the element of petition is a subordinate and secondary one, by relegating it to the background. If it is an element at all, if men are to ask for daily bread even after they have asked for the highest spiritual blessings of the knowledge of God, and the reign of God, why then they are to

Digitized by Google

ask for something specific; and how is it anything but a form, a mockery, to ask God for what only comes by obeying fixed laws, and which, if you obey them, comes whether you ask or not? These are the questions of our day, asked, no doubt, sometimes from a mere spirit of criticism, but often from an honest wish to find an answer, and with an evident hopelessness of ever getting one.

There seems to be but one course for any Christian teacher to take as regards these difficulties of our day—to do his best to meet and remove them.

In doing so, he must make up his mind to a certain amount of misconstruction and misrepresentation. It is impossible to endeavour to readjust the conventional language of religion, to meet men's actual difficulties without puzzling the minds of those who never think of anything deeply, whose whole idea of religion is bound up with conventional language interpreted in a conventional fashion, who suffer, *e.g.*, grievous spiritual perplexity as the result of a statement that God is not the author of evil, and that on the whole it is better to put evils down to their right causes. To such persons, who are an element, alas! in most congregations, the endeavour to clear up difficulties, which thoughtful people feel, always sounds like a surrender of cherished positions. But it is hopeless to endeavour to consider them; they belong

Digitized by Google

to an order of mind whose only idea of "things" are the "names" by which the things are called, and the completion of their education in "things" is apparently reserved for another state of existence. No doubt there are these difficulties to be faced. They often only want facing and dragging out, but if they are shirked and evaded, their presence discourages and damps even those who are not convinced by them. And we want courage and heart to help us to pray, for it is often very difficult; we want to face and dispose of the uneasy suspicion that lurks in the background, that prayer is perhaps of no use, that all things are settled, and that we may as well leave out our prayers, save our time, and relieve ourselves of an unwelcome duty.

The great modern argument against prayer of petitionary kind is, that the more we advance beyond the merely empirical stage and understand the nature of the universe, the more convinced we become that God rules the world by fixed laws and invariable modes; and, further, that on the whole these laws ensure the general welfare, or, to use the modern phrase, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, that incidentally, and in the process of evolution these laws may inflict apparent hardship, but the end is the survival of the fittest—the general welfare. How, then, it is asked, can we hope or wish that He

Digitized by Google

should violate these laws in order to favour this or that man, to supply his wants or to gratify his desire? This applies especially to prayer for temporal blessings, to prayer for rain or fine weather, or abundant harvests, or health, for recovery, *e.g.*, of the sick. On all these matters we know that law is supreme and invariable. Many people feel difficulties about using the prayers for rain and fair weather, and they are not happily expressed compositions; moreover, there is this fatal objection to their use—that the same weather is seldom wanted everywhere, of which fact the farmer's wish that his clergyman should pray that it might rain in one field, and that it should be fine in the next, is a homely illustration.

Rain, we know, is an effect of atmospheric laws, which, given certain conditions, render it inevitable; health and disease are the results of physiological laws, which absolutely determine that one man shall live and another die. To think, then, of rain and disease as dependent on the Will of a Being who can send or withhold them at pleasure, seems to those who know anything of these laws to be utterly unscientific and irrational; to belong to the days of darkness when people believed in witches and vampires, to the days before science had shed its light on these dark places. But now that darkness has given place to light, caprice to law, con-

Digitized by Google

fusion to order, it is not now God Who sends rain, but rain that comes owing to invariable causes. So as to sickness. We know now that disease must run its course, that it cannot be arbitrarily arrested.

Where then, men ask, is there room for prayer? How can we believe that we are not enacting a solemn mockery when we try to change, for our own supposed advantage, that perfect Will which works out by fixed methods and invariable laws the welfare of the universe?

Such is a fair and moderate statement of the ordinary objections to the petitionary elements in prayer, and, as I have said, what we saw last Sunday does not touch this unless we exclude petition altogether. Any one might answer to what I then urged, "Granted all you say, that the common conception of prayer is too limited, too unspiritual; granted that prayer is much more than mere asking for what we wish to have and have not got; granted that the highest view is that it is communion with God;—still, does it not include asking and receiving, asking even for personal gifts, the gifts of the Spirit? What scope, then, under the modern scientific theory of the invariable and universal reign of law, of God ruling, *i.e.*, according to certain unalterable methods and sequences—what scope is there for such prayers as these? Is it not irrational to believe you can get

Digitized by Google

any answer even to the prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread'? How can God answer such a prayer except by working miracles? And is it reasonable to expect that He will do this, or would it be good if He would do so?"

This is the very root and heart of the question, and I ask your patient attention to what can be said.

I. Prayer in its petitionary aspect is quite reasonable altogether apart from any question of infringing law, because God can and does influence ourselves. He influences the heart and the conscience, and through them the will of man, and by this means He can answer many of our prayers for temporal blessings. We shall all agree that it is what we are in ourselves that matters most, far more than the circumstances that surround us. "The life is more than meat," character is more than circumstances, and a change in our disposition does far more than any change of circumstances. Take the case of a beggar asking for food. If you could give him industry and love of struggle, you would do far more to answer his prayer than by giving him a handful of sovereigns or the contents of a butcher's shop; you would change his character, his inmost self. So if God can change ourselves—and there is nothing in the argument about fixed natural laws which touches that point—He can in a most effectual fashion answer

Digitized by Google

our prayers for temporal blessings. This is very obviously the case as regards the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." Surely we ask for power and energy to work for it;* surely we do not ask to have it poured into our laps with no effort. What we ask is the wish to toil, the wisdom to toil, the strength to toil, and then the fruit of toil. Surely that is a prayer according to God's Will, that He would make our wills like His, and so bring us these blessings. Such a spiritual gift as sincere trust in God—I mean such a trust as will save a man from anxiety, or will help him to face even hard trials—is worth far more than if he were to possess the most ample provision for the future, since that very provision for the future becomes a care and anxiety to us, and too often a hindrance. Surely we find, too, that again and again, out of the same circumstances, the same tasks, the same homes, come such different men—one man with the sunshine on his soul that lights up his surroundings; the other darkening, depressing all he comes near. The one man creates a home as different from the other as light from darkness, though he is just as short of money. Why is it so? Because of *what he is.* Surely there is room, there is a wide scope, for answers to prayers in facts such as these. God can

* Cf. F. D. Maurice on "the Lord's Prayer."

Digitized by Google

give all we ask for in the range of external blessings by simply changing ourselves. We pray for a happy home, for deliverance from want and anxiety, God touches the spring within us, and lo! the prayer is answered by our own changed attitude, and we find that we were praying to be delivered from, as though it were the fault of others, that which was a trouble of our own creating. God changes the man, and things around are changed, though in themselves they remain unchanged—"old things are passed away, all things are become new," but the change is in him that prayed. I imagine that, if we knew all, the experience of many a sick-bed would bear out this statement. It may be useless, if you like, to pray that the fever should not run its course, or that the diseased organ should not exhibit the natural progress of development; but is it not an obvious truism to say that often a recovery from sickness depends on character, on endurance, on cheerfulness, on patience? Are there not men and women now in their graves who died simply because some trivial disorder found a pampered body, and a weak will, or a hysterical tendency which was the consequences of drams and drugs, who might be alive if they had given themselves to God early in life, and laid the foundations of a character that would endure the strain of fever or the shock to the nervous system of accident—laid the

Digitized by Google

foundations in the self-control, in the patience, the kindliness, the cheerfulness that comes from continual communion with God? And if you take the extreme case of being asked to pray for recovery, there is much to be considered. It may be useless to summon us to pray at such beds for the suspension of the ordinary laws that govern health and disease, but it can never be useless to summon us to pray for that inward change of character which, in the sick as in the whole, so often determines the course and issue of sickness or of disabling accident.

God, then, may respect all laws, and yet answer prayers by influencing our consciences and hearts, and making us thus choose the higher course. I am quite aware of the objection that would be taken to this statement by a certain school of metaphysicians, who would bring the acting of the will also under the dominion of fixed laws, but it would be foreign to my present purpose to endeavour to meet that objection.

II. And if this be so, then it also follows God can answer many more prayers by influencing the conduct of our neighbours through their hearts and consciences and wills.

If we only think for a moment, we see how much we depend for the good of our lives on those who stand nearest to us. Not only the whole comfort of

Digitized by Google

our life, our peace of mind, but often our health and our consequent ability to do our work, depends on their temper and moods. The way those about us feel towards us and act towards us must affect our happiness, and does very often affect our circumstances. How differently we all act, how much more freely and generously, if we feel we are surrounded by trust and appreciation, than if we are the subjects of microscopic jealousy or the victims of an unsympathetic companionship! A few survive it, but most men dwindle under it. What poor cramped creatures men and women become, with no heart for anything useful or generous, who live in an unloving and narrow-minded atmosphere! A few survive, but they suffer loss; they do not do all they might or dare all they would—"the iron enters into their soul." Or again, what different people we become when we work with those on whom we can rely for truthfulness and honesty! It all goes to prove one thing—how dependent we are, for what we are and what we do, on the wills of others. And those wills God can influence without any miracle; and in that influence there is large and free scope for prayer and for answers to prayer that change all the circumstances of our lives. This much, we can see plainly, goes to make prayer reasonable.

III. And one more consideration. We talk about



Digitized by Google

miracles and the miraculous, meaning thereby that which transcends known law and observed physical sequence. How do we know that, if we knew enough, we should not find higher laws which would bring miracles under the reign of law? How do we know that we are not simply at the threshold of a vast system of laws that transcend our present possibilities of observation and experiment, and that what we call the miraculous may not turn out to be the normal government, given certain conditions? Take Christ's miracles; they are violations of known laws, and the argument from the Christian side that used to be brought forward was, because He could violate known laws, therefore He was more than man. To the modern scientific spirit such an argument seems utterly inconclusive—nay, seems to prove the reverse of what it professes to; and, granted certain premises, such is the irresistible conclusion. Granted these premises, that laws of the universe are invariable and impartial, and that such laws secure on the whole the universal welfare, and the conclusion follows that it would be unworthy of the Divine activity to disturb those laws without some enormous necessity.

Now, to many people the failure of this argument about miracles might be disturbing, because they have no eyes to see the inherent beauty of Christ's Character and His correspondence to our highest

Digitized by Google

moral and spiritual conceptions; they inherit the sign-seeking dispositions of the people of Jerusalem, and, unless Christ did wonderful things, they would not believe in Him. But there are others to whom the old argument from miracles was always a distasteful one, because they felt Christ's Godhead to be established by higher and greater considerations.* For them it is a relief, an intellectual and moral relief, to be able to see in what one calls miracles the glimpses of the working of some higher laws, for observing the full working of which we have not yet opportunity and capacity. And they can see that, when we ask God to do that which transcends known laws, if it be His Will, what we really ask for is that He will give us more and more of the Christ-spirit and the Christ-power of will by which those higher laws, of which Christ showed us glimpses, may be able to work more perfectly. The objection that in praying for temporal blessings you are asking God to be a disturber of laws which act on the whole for the good of mankind, melts away, if it is answered, "no; we ask God to disturb nothing, but we ask, if it be His Will, to give us the love, and the power, and the self-control, the spirit, that was in Christ, and so to make it possible that again on earth may be seen glimpses of those higher laws, which rather

* See Sermon on "Christ's Words."

Digitized by Google

transcend than contradict the known laws of our experience."

So much it has seemed right to say by way of endeavour to meet difficulties on this subject. But in conclusion I cannot press on you too strongly the immensely more important side of prayer which I dwelt on so much last Sunday, that it is communion with God, an endeavour to think with Him—not to prescribe to the Divine Will, but to rise to its horizons, to tune our imperfect wills into harmony with His Right Loving Will. That Will we know to be the welfare, the highest welfare, of ourselves and all men. But that Will cannot work without us in ourselves, or even wholly in others around us except through ourselves. It is an awful thought that we can hinder God's gracious purposes in ourselves and others, but it is a truth; we can. God has chosen to give us the power, He has chosen to surround Himself with children possessed of will, intelligence, and affection, and even God cannot force us into goodness. If we are to be good it can only be by making His commandments our aim. You cannot make a child wise by cutting his head open and putting a book into his brain; and just so, you cannot make a child good by forcing him to do what is right. You can use good influence, good methods, trust him, throw him gradually on his own resources—show grief if he

Digitized by Google

does ill, approval when he does well, but no force will do it; if he will not respond, he will continue obstinate and disobedient. And thus God acts, and must act, with us men, since we are what we are. He can only make us good by raising us to His Will, and so He teaches us to pray—teaches us to pray continually, to think with Him in solitude and in society, to raise our thoughts, to try to view all questions from the Divine standpoint; teaches us to bring, not only our faults and failings to Him to help us out of them, but our wishes and our plans to forward, our ideals to correct, our sorrows to comfort, our trials to bear along with us; above all, to bring our hearts that we may be invested with a new power of loving, our minds that we may be endued with an ever-expanding comprehension to know the unknowable, our wills that they may be tuned ever more completely with His own Right Loving Will.

Such prayers God longs for; such prayers man learns to say if he is at home with God. No moral virtue, no kindness towards others, can be a substitute for them. We may be honest men and faithful friends, and yet be refusing to God the things that He longs for—the cry in every need, the sharing of every care, the aspiration in every perplexity. "Show Thou me the way that I should walk in, for I lift up my soul unto Thee." Such prayers are music in the

Digitized by Google

ears of God; they reach the great Heart of the Father. "They raise us into closer communication with Him Who is and reigns and loves." They give us rest in trial and perplexity; they give strength to every purpose, power to every choice and wisdom to every determination. Such prayers may He teach us all to say, for Jesus Christ's sake!

Digitized by Google

# *JACOB'S SIN.*

"All these things are against me."—GEN. xlii. 36.

JACOB is, perhaps, of all the Old Testament characters, the most easily criticized from a modern point of view. There is something so eminently repulsive in his method of winning his father's blessing that we are inclined to dismiss him at once without trying to understand him; without any regard to the habits of his times, or its moral standards. Of course, considered in itself, his action is indefensible; the whole story of his gaining Isaac's blessing is the story of an act of great dishonour, of a great sin, only let us understand, while we say this, what the sin was. He did not wrong Esau, he did not cheat him out of anything; the birthright was Jacob's. Even before his birth it had been promised him by God—"the elder," it had been said, "shall serve the younger," and the promise was his stay and support, his treasure, the ground of his aspiration, the thing

Digitized by Google

he clung to and meditated on. That great and wondrous promise, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," was his, and he had made it his own by his own acceptance of all that it involved all through his youth, while Esau was enjoying himself in field-sports. And his real position in reference to this promise furnishes the only key to his conduct. He felt that, Esau being technically older, complications might arise, and as he wanted to make things quite safe for himself, he tempted Esau to dispose of his semblance of right for a mess of pottage; and then later, when he saw that his father was not proof against the seductions of Esau's savoury meat, and that the blessing might still go away from him, he could not be satisfied to wait for God's way of righting him, but he must needs right himself by a cruel fraud and a deceitful action. He knew that he ought to have the blessing, that it was his by a Divine appointment, and he could not bear the spectacle of its passing away from him. So he tried to force the providence of God; he wanted to improve upon God's way of working things out—to make sure of getting what he knew was his, no matter in what way. It is a story often repeated since; it is the story of right seeing itself likely to be defrauded by might, and using deception to hold its own. It is using unhallowed means to gain right

Digitized by Google

ends; it is an anticipation in those early days of the doctrine that "the end justifies the means"—that, if the object is a good one, you may wink at any way of compassing it. This was how things came to Jacob.

Only a little sin, and only a slight deception, and then he gets his rights, and the danger of subsequent complications is gone. It was about as real a temptation as ever came to a man, especially if you take this into account, that Jacob cared for the birthright, lived for it, while Esau had even no sense of the meaning of spiritual privileges. Jacob's conduct was wholly indefensible, wrong even from the standpoint of those days; but it was not so bad as it looks at first sight. He did not cheat Esau out of anything; he only used bad means to keep his own rights. That was a great sin, and the way it was done, the insensibility to his old father's feelings that he shows, makes it worse; but it was not what we think at first. It is a bad thing to use bad means to keep your rights, but it is a far worse thing to use bad means to cheat another out of his.

But here it was, this great sin, in the outset of his career, and it is at least useful for us to use it as a warning. If Jacob sinned, Jacob suffered, and his is a very striking instance of the way in which sin finds men out; it found him out with a dramatic

Digitized by Google

completeness. Jacob wounded his father's affections by deceit, and Jacob was wounded in his own by the deceits of Laban most bitterly. Jacob behaved cruelly to his father. Look what he suffered; from his own children, from the treachery of Simeon and Levi, the wickedness of Reuben; from the envy felt by his other sons of Joseph, their cruel sale of him, the bitter mourning over his supposed fate, the agonizing sight of his coat; from the famine, the supposed loss of his one remaining treasure, his Benjamin; from the bitter, long, dreary foreboding during his absence; the cry of utter desolation, "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." How bitterly his forgiven sin came back to him, dogging him, meeting him in an agonizing repetition of almost the selfsame circumstances, bringing him down in sorrow to the grave! No life tells more graphically, more dramatically, the old story, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

The real lessons of Jacob's life are two. (1) It teaches us, first of all, the meaning of retribution. God forgives freely, but He does not interfere to prevent even the truest and best of His servants from feeling what sin is. This is the real meaning of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean letting you off the penalty and leaving you as you were before.

Digitized by Google

Divine forgiveness is not like wiping a score off the slate and leaving the slate clean, so that you may be free to begin again. Divine forgiveness is not merely consistent with the fact of man's suffering for his sins, it may demand that he should suffer that the poison may be drained out of him, that he may learn to forsake sin, permeating poison as it is. Forgiveness is not letting people off; it is forth-giving—it is the giving forth of God's pure life to cast out their polluted life, and the infusion means pain.

God's laws cannot be broken—not that God is vindictive, but His laws are a reflection of Himself; they are no mere arbitrary commands, but inevitable laws, which we break at our peril, which avenge themselves. If we break them, if we overreach or defraud others, the penalty comes. It begins by the working of ordinary laws; there is no interruption, no coming in of some abnormal terror; simply the outraged law reasserts itself in some natural consequence. Jacob's deceit is his sin; Laban's deceit is its punishment. Jacob behaved cruelly to his father; his own sons behaved cruelly to himself. Sin is its own avenger. God does not step in to punish, but His own laws, which are His as being reflections from His moral Being, work themselves out. Punishment is but "the stream of consequence flowing on unchecked;" it is in some shape or other

Digitized by Google

inevitable. We may be forgiven, but God will not work a miracle to let us go unpunished. I do not say that things always occur with such an apparently detailed correspondence of cause and effect as in Jacob's case, but sometimes they do. How many parents have to seek the real cause of the ingratitude of their children in some far-off sin of their own childhood! They cannot command now, because the moral temper of command was never formed by obedience. How many a sin of lust has found its own Nemesis in that weakened moral empire over others, which is really the outcome of a perverted heart!

Brethren, it is well to learn this, to make certain of it. Sin will come back, will find you out; Heaven has no favourites who are let off. It is well to learn it thoroughly. There is a something of the gambling element in our nature, willing to take its chance, willing to run the risk if the issues are uncertain. There is no uncertainty. The law that binds punishment to sin is a law of moral gravitation—it spares none. No one was ever more comforted by wondrous visions, by tokens of God's providence, by marks of favour, than Jacob, and yet through it all the troubles went on; he "received the things that he had done." There is an awful law of consequence in sin and its punishment, a germ of identity between the seed and

Digitized by Google

its fruit, that sometimes shocks and startles us. Let us think of it when we come face to face with temptation. When we have done with the sin, the sin will not have done with us; when we have done enjoying the wickedness, it will not leave us like a friend that we have offended. God give us grace in hours of temptation to stop and think, "Where will that leave me if I do it? What am I bringing on myself?"

(2) And then there is the side of things that comes so often before us that I need not dwell long on it—the fact that these very punishments are, through God's mercy, not merely preventive, but redemptive. When the bitter cry of anguish is rising from our lips, "Against Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight," when we sink down ashamed at the thoughts which our present trials bring back to us, then let us remember that in the sorrows and trials is God's merciful discipline for our cure. Some things must be burned out of us; the stronger the nature the more necessary it seems. Let us grasp the red-hot iron cheerfully and bravely; it is better to suffer than to remain callous or to let sores mortify. Jacob would never have learned to hate his own deceit if he had not found himself so sorely stricken by the deceit of others. The one hope of his becoming true lay in the experimental knowledge of the utter foulness and

Digitized by Google

misery of deceit. He would never have loathed his own cruelty to his father if he had not found how the iron of his deceitful cruelty entered into his soul. His afflictions did teach him; they trained his character, they became remedies. Things, too, were not as bad as they seemed; they were turning out now so as to give him some comfort. Simeon was coming back, Joseph was alive, Benjamin was his again.

So let us remember in hours of our affliction, when the devil whispers in our ear, "God is angry with you and dealing hardly with you;" when he hisses, "You have sinned; He hates you!"—let us remember God's words, "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord: thoughts of peace, and not of evil." Thoughts of peace. He does not leave you alone; He will deal truly with you. He will not let your wounds mortify painlessly; He will probe and heal. "I, the Lord, wound, and I heal." Even when we know so well what sorrow means, out of what sin in our past it comes, even then the voice comes to us from heaven, "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ." And for us there is but one answer, that answer which is to many the expression of the most utter truth in their lives: "It is good for me that I have been in trouble, that I may learn Thy statutes." "Before I was

Digitized by Google

troubled, I went wrong, but now have I kept Thy word."

Say, then, when the past seems to overshadow you and you climb the grey hill, and the sun goes down at noonday, and there in its horrible ghastly nakedness lies the cross of shame, the cross of bitter sorrow, the shame and the reproach of sin lies before you, and the tongues of men and women hiss at you, "There, there so would we have it," make still with Mary the great answer, "'Be it unto me according to Thy word.' Thus is God dealing generously with me; thus is He restoring me." He is nearer you than ever there if you only knew it—nearer than in the calm sunny days of unclouded innocence, near to heal.

Jacob would gladly have been banished again for the wondrous sights of Bethel, gladly have suffered again for the strength and consolation of that night-long wrestle, for all the energy it brought into his life, the power to prevail. So it is with God's truest servants, with many of them. They sin, often far more deeply and disastrously than the half-hearted and careless in their generations who are too shallow to go wrong; they sin hard * and they suffer. Nothing intervenes to let them off; they suffer awfully, but out of their suffering comes a blessedness and a nearness to God, a hatred of sin, a moral power of sympathy

* This expression is one of Kingsley's.

Digitized by Google

with others unknown before; out of the mire, out of the dust into which they have sunk, God takes them to a nearness to Himself, all impossible before, that He may set them, too, with all their bitter defiling recollections, that He may set them, like Jacob, with the princes, even with the princes of His people.

Digitized by Google

# *JACOB'S WRESTLING.*

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."—GEN. xxxii. 24—28.

THIS is one of the strangest stories under which the Bible, in a fashion suitable to the age in which it was written, presents eternal truth to us—strange in itself, strange in its setting, yet charged with deep meaning and full of most consoling instruction for those who have insight to pierce the shell of its Jewish complexion and colouring, and to seize its underlying and essential features.

Twenty years before Jacob had been guilty of that sin the real nature of which we have considered in this place before.* He had deceived his father, had resorted to treachery to obtain the birthright, and the fact that that which seemed to be Esau's

* See Sermon XXIX.



Digitized by Google

yet was really his own by promise, though it modifies our judgment, does not alter the sin. But, however much we may understand that what he got in a wrong way was really his own, Esau did not choose so to understand it. Esau from the first had considered himself a deeply injured man, as most men would, and for these twenty years, for all that Jacob knew, had been nursing and cherishing the sense of his injury. Now they were to meet again. Jacob had just received the intelligence of Esau's approach, a meeting was inevitable, and the thought of it was sufficiently disturbing. Jacob, with a characteristic prudence that never forsook him, divided his company into two bands—in the first which would meet Esau he sent those for whom he least cared, so that they might bear the brunt of Esau's attack if he did attack; and that the second band, composed of those whom he loved most, might be able to escape. As for himself, he felt, in a way we shall all understand, that he must be alone before he met with one who recalled to him the bitterest reminiscences of his life. He had, so to speak, to formulate his position towards Esau; to consider his line of defence if he met him as an enemy; to consider how he could meet him at all. It was one of those moments that imperatively demanded solitude. The past has to be revisited, the ghosts of old sins have to be faced. In

Digitized by Google

exile they were thrust out of sight; change of scene, new interests, had obliterated almost the sense of his own wrong-doing; but Esau's face will bring it all back again, and Jacob must be alone before he sees him—alone in the still darkness, alone by the silently flowing waters, to shape and to reshape his life, to focus his old self by the new lights which twenty years of living had brought to him. None could share his load—none, not even Rachel, could be with him; he must bear his own burden.

Brethren, I must pause one moment. All of us have need of such moments of solitude, especially at certain times. Do you shrink from solitude because you think nothing but increased agony and renewed restlessness must come from facing the past—that you had better go on somehow, and let the past settle itself how it can? Depend on it, we need, not a perpetual morbid hunting up of buried sins, not a lingering in the tombs, but we all need, especially if we shrink from it, we do need, at times an enforced solitude, a wrestling at Jabbok alone; a brave, strong sending away of those dearest to us; a night of reckoning with what has taken us away from God—of earnest seeking till we find Him, and are found by Him. Do not let us throw away golden opportunities because we are too cowardly to be alone at Peniel even for a night.

Digitized by Google

Jacob, then, was left alone—circumstances forced him on to himself. He must ponder on what he had done, what he should do, how he should meet and avert the anger of Esau. Should he trust again to the weapon of nature, his own cunning, to deliver him from difficulties and dangers that that very cunning had done so much to induce? Can he not, with that subtle brain, discover some way of turning away his brother's wrath? Suppose these propitiatory presents which he has sent on before him fail of their effect; what is he to do next? What a net it all seems to have woven round him! What a temptation it is to weave another fraud to get out of the old deceit! Is it not a crowning instance of what we all know—how one lie seems to necessitate another, one falseness seems to make another inevitable? Oh! how again and again he beats himself, as it were, against the bars of the cage he has built; how again and again he thinks with deepening remorse of the sins of his youth; how he wishes and longs that he had never committed them! He is almost angry even amid his remorse. It seems so hard that, after so many years of toil and suffering and exile, after his heavenly visions, after seeing the angels on the ladder, after visions of Mahanaim, after dedicating himself to God, it seems so hard that the sin of his youth should

Digitized by Google

take him and compass him about and cast him down. Surely there must be some way out of it; surely he can shake off these fears that confuse and blind him, and look at the position calmly and coolly, and formulate some method of appeasing Esau by explanations. There we can see him on the banks of the stream, tortured with cares and anxieties and thoughts and fears, but still trusting in himself, still leaning on his natural talent for diplomacy, still looking for some way of deliverance which flesh and blood might teach him. And so the long night wears away. If Jacob had been left to himself, the morning would have only found him weary of watching, disconsolate, half resolved, weak, unable to keep to any plan for two consecutive moments.

But God was with him, near him, by him. Jacob had been wrestling with God all this time, fighting, struggling against His Will, trying to get his own way, to help himself in his own way out of his troubles; and now God will wrestle with Jacob. It seems to him as though some unseen force, some physical shape, had come into contact with him, and what does this mean but that there rises in him a conviction, a slowly formulating conviction—a conviction against which he struggles—that he is on the wrong road and has been all his life; that he is leaning on a broken reed, his talent for diplomacy,

Digitized by Google

his natural astuteness; that it has brought him to this. Slowly, yet surely, the conviction grows; it seems to grasp him and to hold him like a vice. God has sought him, God has found him. God has come to teach him that a higher wisdom than any astuteness guides and rules the fates of men; that he must no longer trust in himself; in his own craft and policy, in his own power of making it all right with Esau, but in God, and in doing all God's law, in doing the right and good in any fashion, in the path of righteousness; and so the conviction grows that, if he will only do right, if he will only humble himself before Esau, confess his duplicity, and resolve henceforth to take the path of honesty and keep to it—resolve henceforth to live as the servant of the Lord of Righteousness—it may still be well with him. If only, instead of trying to get the better of men and evading the eye of God, he will take the true, straightforward, honest, open course, he will yet be delivered from the misery and the darkness and the perplexity that haunts and tortures him.

Slowly, and by degrees, and painfully, it dawns upon him; God, as it were, presses upon him; he is struggling with some manifestation of God, some personal messenger. Whether this expresses a physical reality, or is merely an accommodation

Digitized by Google

of language to the ideas of that age, the spiritual struggle is the essence of the matter. And that goes on slowly, for man's whole nature is not changed in a moment for good or ill; he must go through a very agony of conflict if he is to cast off the ingrained habits of years. And so Jacob strives against this growing conviction—wrestles with God, Who is strengthening that conviction within him; casts back many an anxious glance to see if the natural subtlety which he has so relied on may not help him still, if there be not some way in which he may save himself out of Esau's hands. It is not till he is faint and weary with the struggle that God touches, as it were, and breaks the very sinew of his strength, making him helpless, and thereby making him conscious of his helplessness, enforcing the truth by an outward disabling mark that left itself on his body. Then he yields, submits himself to the rule and wisdom of the righteousness of God, and consents to abandon for ever the crooked way of policy for the straight path of honesty.

Ah! blessed is it for us if, like Jacob, even with all our strength gone, even with the sinew shrunk, even with the consciousness of our own limping helplessness, we learn our lesson out of the long night-struggle that no talent or strength of our own can really deliver us—that only in the path of God's

Digitized by Google

righteousness, in union with Christ, is there deliverance from evil and inward peace.

Then, when we have learnt that we are on a new road, as the story teaches us, He that is overcome by God Himself becomes a prince, a lawgiver. When our long night-struggles, our wrestling against God, and God's gracious wrestling with us, have taught us to give up our wills to God, then God Himself becomes ours, and all that is His becomes ours too. We no longer trust in any power, wisdom, craft, dexterity of our own; we trust in doing right. It is not we that work, but God worketh in us, and "all things work together for good." We call in all the forces of heaven; we become princes who have power with God; we fling away our broken reeds, and settle into our new strength. Then we find the truth of the saying * of an old rabbi, one of Jacob's descendants, "Do thou God's Will as if it were thine own, and thou shalt find Him doing thy will as if it were His." This is the truth that underlies the second part of the scene where Jacob wrestles with God. God had wrestled with him till He had torn from him his self-confidence, his trust in his own subtlety, which had been the bane of his life, and now Jacob finds that he can wrestle with God; that

* Quoted in an article on the text in *Expositor*, vol. x., 1st series, to which article I have to express my indebtedness for many thoughts of this sermon.

Digitized by Google

a strange new strength has entered into his life, the strength that dares to say to God Himself, "Tell me Thy Name. . . . I will not let Thee go unless Thou bless me." Oh, magnificent audacity! No more Jacob the supplanter, but Israel; as a prince he has power with God, and has prevailed. The name—not merely the outward label, but the name—that is, the token of the inmost character, the name that reveals the man, is changed. No more is he Jacob the supplanter; he becomes Israel the prince. And the sequel shows this truth—that when a man seeks God's Will, things do turn out better than he has any right to expect. For when Esau comes to meet Jacob with his four hundred men, his trained free-booters, ready I doubt not, to wreak his vengeance (for why otherwise should he have come thus attended?)—when Esau saw this long-absent brother, a weak and toil-worn man, limping towards him, then all his thoughts of vengeance vanished in a rush of pure and generous emotion, and Esau fell on Jacob's neck, and "the two men kissed each other and wept together as they had done in the old days when they played around their father's feet." * Can we not well conceive that it was that very halting in the thigh, that limping, shambling gait which came from his wrestling with God and goodness, that

* *Expositor*, vol. x. p. 251.

Digitized by Google

very infirmity, "that touched the heart of the bold and active hunter, to whom the loss of free and vigorous motion must have seemed the greatest of ills," and that Jacob owed his safety to that touch which was the signal of his taking God's Will as his own? At any rate, at peace with God, he was at peace with Esau; for to be at peace with God, even if we suffer under the revenge of others, is to be at peace with all.

Brethren, we all of us may—most of us must—know something of the stern conflict which had so happy an issue for Jacob. It is not, of course, that some do not escape it, or that any can antedate it; and speaking to a mixed congregation, comprising many young persons (some much too young even to understand what I say), one must guard one's self from misconception. No one can antedate these conflicts, and there are some pious people who are only too ready to pity themselves and claim the attention of others quite unnecessarily for mental and spiritual trials which they never really experience. At any rate, children and young people growing into manhood or womanhood in sheltered places know nothing of it; for them the lesson is conveyed by an earlier meeting of Jacob with God—by the ladder between heaven and earth, which figures, by the open door between heaven and earth, and by the self-dedication

Digitized by Google

that follows, that they have only to believe that God loves them, to dedicate themselves to Him, to learn by degrees all that His love involves of awe and gratitude, all that their self-dedication commits them to. And there are those who go through life and need nothing more than the deepening of such lessons. It is cruel to force others on them; cruel to teach them and expect in them the tokens of a dark and lurid experience that belongs to a more troubled life. "Among the smooth places of the stream is their portion;" let it be so. But many of us, I know, must go through the night at Jabbok in some shape if ever our lives are to be constructed anew, if ever we are to be true to God's law of righteousness. No salving over of old wounds will do, no anodynes of forgetfulness. We must be left alone; we must struggle, wrestle, till we get right, till we know ourselves and God—know the Name, the inmost character, of Him with Whom we have to do. And to you I can only say, whenever and however this struggle comes, whether God seems to wrestle with you, or you with God, remember that it is not that you may wring blessings out of His hand which He is reluctant to bestow, but that God may constrain you to accept blessings higher than any you may conceive of. When mental trial, the deep trial of doubt that wants to see light, or outward suffering,

Digitized by Google

or the trial of meeting the consequences of old sins come, there is our night at the ford Jabbok. Oh, let us meet it alone! You want to talk about it, but do not give way to the temptation; there is far more reality in the spiritual struggles of those who wrestle out things alone with God. Shall we complain because we are restless and dissatisfied with all solutions, if God comes at last, and through all this dissatisfaction, through the breakdown of all we trusted in, tells us His Name, gives us His blessing? Ah! let us not miss the meaning of our dark hours of nameless fear, when in imagination we exhaust the whole circle of our resources and find them nothing and ourselves powerless, horribly insecure, conscious of a want which nothing we know of can satisfy, feeling out of an abyss of insecurity after some firm foothold; let us not miss the true meaning. It is God coming near to wrestle with us, to teach us the secret and the mystery of existence, to show us that only in doing the Will of God and choosing the Righteousness of God is there any security. Some of us need it, almost enough to make us pray for it. We buoy ourselves up with happy self-confidence and self-complacence, we believe in ourselves; we are so capable in many things—not weak like some we see, not slaves of drink or passion; or we are full of zeal for religious observances which

Digitized by Google

others neglect; and lo! some crisis comes which lands us at Jabbok alone and at night, and lowers our self-respect and destroys our self-confidence, and makes us feel how helpless and more than helpless we are, our righteousness as filthy rags, our observances mere fetish-worship. Ah! let us not miss the meaning. It is the Love of God teaching us to trust Him. The very kindest thing that God can do for us is, even though it be by some dark fall, to drive us out of our easy self-conceit, to show us our helplessness, to teach us to say, "Thy Will, not ours, be done," to rob us of our fancied strength and to endue us with His own power, and so to set us among the princes of His people. His greatest gifts come out of such dark hours—the gift of taking and keeping His ways, of taking His Will as our own. He has forced us by His own gentle pressure; He has wrestled with us all night. He has touched the very sinew of our strength, but out of it comes the choice made, the path chosen, the Will accepted; out of it comes the power that even heals old wounds and brings those estranged into fellowship with us; out of it comes the one rest, the knowledge of Him Who, while He has seemed to wrestle with us, has really taught us in those dark hours something of Himself and of ourselves as seen in Him.

Digitized by Google

# *THE REAL MESSAGE OF SOCIALISM.*

"And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation.—ST. MATT. xii. 25.

THE circumstances which drew from our Lord the announcement of this general principle are sufficiently familiar to us. The Pharisaic spirit, on this occasion the spirit of envious criticism, had detected, as it thought, an overwhelming objection to His work of mercy. It was, they said, no doubt a triumph, an apparent triumph, won at the expense of the fundamental principle of good as antagonistic to evil; it was a "casting out of evil through the aid of the prince of evil." Our Lord answers them somewhat at length by a series of dilemmas, and in doing so lays down a principle which admits of a much wider application than to the case which was immediately before Him. A divided kingdom is a kingdom on

Digitized by Google

the road to ruin; it would be so in Satan's case, and He presses that point. It is so in any case—the principle is of universal application. Let us take His words this morning, as I trust we may surely do without any violence, as containing a most solemn warning in reference to that Kingdom which He came to found. Divided against itself, at war with its own principles, it is always and everywhere in danger of desolation, the desolation of a barren unfruitfulness. It is to some aspects of this danger, that are often overlooked, that I ask your attention.

I. In this place, at any rate, one may assume that the purpose and motive of Christ's mission is comprehended as the New Testament represents it, viz. to found a Divine Kingdom. The whole end and object of the Divine education of the world as described from Genesis to Revelation, the whole aim and motive of the often painful discipline of Israel—their contact with great nations, and the sense of their own weakness which was driven into them through the fact of subjection, the sense of helplessness they experienced when "fast bound in misery and iron," the ever-renewed deliverance when "they cried unto the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them out of their distress;"—all was a first lesson in the degrading tendency of brute force as a means of empire. Again, the establishment of the kingdom

Digitized by Google

of David, the shape which even in its decadence that kingdom gave to the glowing imagery of the later prophets, all the fulfilment of the promise and all the looking out for a greater fulfilment under the sense of a temporary failure, all tended in one direction—their realization of the Divine ideal, "a kingdom not out of this world," yet in this world; a kingdom of heaven on earth, which, while it dealt with the temporal, was founded upon, was in perpetual touch with the eternal behind the temporal; a kingdom which was based upon the immutable laws, always strong, of righteousness and truth; a kingdom strongly antithetical in its principles to the known kingdoms of this world. At last it came; at last there was found faith enough, insight enough, to recognize a sovereignty, not of brute force, but of love; at last the isolating tendency of mere victorious power was met by the unifying tendency of self-sacrificing love, and the kingdom was set up by Christ on the foundation of apostles and prophets. And so quite naturally He was recognized from the first as a King. His great theme was the kingdom of heaven here and now; it was the gospel, *i.e.* the good news of the kingdom, which the apostles proclaimed—Philip at Samaria; Paul at Ephesus and Thessalonica, and in his last hours at Rome we lose sight of him preaching "the kingdom of God with all confidence."

Digitized by Google

Whatever misconceptions may have gathered round the ideal of Christ through the introduction of ideas borrowed from earthly sovereignty, whatever incursions absolutism may have made into the discipline of a kingdom which was based upon the principle of service as being the only real evidence of greatness, whatever revolts against the travestied idea of a kingdom these misconceptions and incursions may be responsible for, the fact remains that the founding of a kingdom is alike the only reasonable issue of Old Testament history, and the one avowed and maintained object of our Lord Himself. Those who can see in Christ only some rival of Buddha or Confucius, the originator of ideas or the founder of a quasi-philosophical system, must find their warrant for their hypotheses outside the New Testament. So, again, a system of Christian individualism finds no countenance there. It was to save not men, but *man;* it was to teach men not only how to die as individuals, but how to live as members of a body; it was to hallow man's whole life; it was not to drive him out of the world; "occupy till I come" was its watchword; it was to give him every motive and every sanction to live as the member of this kingdom, that "the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us." And so quite characteristically, when He taught us to pray, He taught us in an order that shows the



Digitized by Google

relative importance of the things we ask for. If the greatest thing we can ask for be that the Name should be hallowed, *i.e.* that God should be, as far as possible, known and loved for being what He is; that men should worship a Holy God, not some savage fate or almighty tyrant or some unknown first cause; if nothing matters to men so much as to have great and worthy conceptions of the Nature of God, to know the Father; if the one thing at the end of Christ's life, which is so great that it fills even Him with ecstasy, is that He has declared to the disciples the Name of the Father and that they know Him; —it follows next and most naturally that man must wish and long for the coming of that Father's Kingdom, for its coming, for its prevailing, for its spreading everywhere, for a great wide common blessing which is to prevail here and now; not for some individual advantage, not that any one may save his own miserable soul, not that he may himself squeeze out of a general ruin into some haven of rest, where he may pass his life without fear and without care, but that the "Kingdom may come," *i.e.* that somewhere among all men an order of things represented by a visible society may come, in which the laws of the Father may be recognized and obeyed, in which man may be inspired by principles and maintained by forces which have their

Digitized by Google

origin in Heaven, in which nations may live at peace with Heaven and one another, in which a personal relationship to a Divine King may be what every man prizes, in which a consequent social relationship to all others may be the most vividly realized of his duties.

This was Christ's idea, and, if we may so speak, in teaching us to pray, "Thy kingdom come," after "Hallowed be Thy Name," He enforced it, viz. that this Kingdom should be for ever more and more coming, that human society should be more and more transfigured through it, that next to the knowledge of God, it should be the greatest thing man can wish for. This Kingdom has come in the establishment and spread of the Church; it is coming still, in spite of partial failure and temporary difficulties, but these failures and difficulties are its danger.

II. The question is, What is hindering it? If we were to ask what is the most disintegrating force at work within this Kingdom at the present day, we should doubtless receive very various answers. One would say doctrinal differences, and with considerable reason to show for it. Another would say that it was the endeavour on the part of certain teachers to minimize any notion of a supernatural Revelation, the claim to use the language of the Creeds and to repudiate their meaning which is openly advanced among us; and

Digitized by Google

no one who sees how fatal such a claim is to sincerity, to the moral foundations of the Christian life, could make light of such a danger. Another would say the danger is lest it should close its eyes to some looked-for supplementary revelation. But is there not a root danger which goes deeper still, which strikes at the very idea of the Kingdom? Is there not the danger of a tyrannical individualism which has proved its armour in other fields, finding, if not a sanction, at least a toleration from the Kingdom of God? Is not the spirit "every man for himself" getting to be more than tolerated, even allowed to be consistent with that other spirit of mutual service which is a fundamental law—a sort of axiom of the Kingdom? Is it not tacitly assumed that the one maxim is for use—an inevitable corollary to the facts of life; and the other is for show—a Sunday phrase, a figure of speech? Is it not the case that, in matters which ought to be the Church's concern if we believe in it as the Kingdom of Heaven—the old question "Am I my brother's keeper?" is being whispered around us, and that in all sorts of shapes and forms which assume that there are evils which are no business of ours, and for which, however much they may press on the weak, it is no business of ours to find a remedy, or to lend a helping hand?

Have we not raised a ghost, too—the ghost of

Digitized by Google

that spirit which once declared that all Christians were members of one Body, that if one member suffered all the members suffered with it, that the hand could not say to the foot, "I have no need of thee"? Has not the ghost of the old spirit of the Kingdom come back to it in the weird and fierce shape of Socialism—come to remind us in rough ungainly ways of a half-forgotten principle, which was, and is, and must be fundamental, but which individualism was obscuring. Socialism is to many, a thing to be denounced, trodden down, banished; it had better be looked at or learnt from, and its causes inquired into. Dr. Arnold says somewhere that he wishes the public might have a history of the present state of society traced backwards. So we had better read the history of Socialism backwards, and consider its reasons; we had better rescue and put in practice the forgotten truth which is giving to Socialism its strength. We cannot fall back into the old mistaken feeling so fruitful of mischief in the past, that these things don't concern the Church. We must leave the cheap and useless trade of denunciation, lest we find ourselves hurling anathemas against the messenger that God has sent to remind a Church that has forgotten her trust, that we are "members one of another."

Members one of another, and yet we raise no voice

Digitized by Google

against the torture which unrestricted competition is subjecting the weakest to!

If you want to see the final results of this unrestricted competition which is being worked with no representative protest from the Church, with, alas! no rebuke from a Christian pulpit, save the voice in the wilderness of some one here and there, read Mr. Burnett's report—and you cannot read a better thing—on the sweating system. Oh, if only in this* place, to which the Church has owed so much, you would rise to this overlooked mission, to search out the cause of the needy and oppressed, not only as individuals, but as the victims of a grinding and oppressive system; if only there could rise in this place some spirit analogous to that which dwelt in the Jewish prophets, and which dealt with the mischiefs and evils and dangers of the time on no archæological principles, but as making the law of God a living reality; if only you would not sit down happy as your elders have done, and say in a helpless fashion, "These laws of supply and demand must go on unregulated, yes, uncorrected, by Christian enterprise; we must leave things to right themselves. To ask for legislation is insanity; men must labour and get no reward, women must live hard unwomanly lives, but the great machine will grind on!" So men

* Preached at Oxford before the University.

Digitized by Google

have said and done, so men have argued and acted about abuses in the Church and abuses in the state, and again and again Christ has come to judgment—come in ways history tells us of, come through some cataclysm. And so it is now that the gaunt and hungry form of Socialism with its true instinct and its impossible remedies arises, and it will be heard, though men may meet it with violence and call in all the resources of scorn and contempt and misrepresentation to crush it; it will be heard, it must be heard, for it has a truth at its bottom. Its very name reminds us of its underlying truth, for the kingdom is a *societas*, we are *socii*, companions, fellow-citizens of a higher kingdom than England; its very name is a message of judgment. And, hopeless as are its remedies, its complaints are only too well founded. These awful things are: this frightful gulf between luxury and starvation, between men who never do a day's work and men who never know a day's relaxation—these things are. The weak do go to the wall; women do work twelve or fourteen hours a day for a few coppers, and the Church, the Body of Christ, is silent, or utters but a weak fitful protest while His members suffer. Because men suffer in classes through the action of laws, the servants of the Kingdom have no word to say. No Isaiah-like voice rings out the condemnation of those who

Digitized by Google

oppress the poor, grind them down to the lowest wages. Is it to be left to Socialism to utter its protest like a ghost rising up from a forgotten past?

Surely we must, unless we are to be silent for ever, at least recognize the call that is made on us—at least see, while there is time, if there be not some meeting-ground in which we may inquire what Socialism means, whether its undoubted forces, its purer instincts, cannot be utilized. Surely, at any rate, our religion binds us to the condemnation of social wrong, however caused; for our religion is not a uniform we can take off in our chamber, or a set of words which we can recite and forget, but a *character*, a Creed vivified into a life—and if it be so, can we put up with this tyrannical individualism? can we hold that the "assertion of rights," and not the fulfilment of duties, is "the foundation of the social structure"? Can we go on treating the idol of our day, material prosperity, with respect and reverence? We are appealed to by the prosperous, and successfully. The Church, the forces of religion, are being summoned every day to bless property, to declare its sacredness. By all means let us say "property is holy," but property held on what terms? Property held as a trust for the good of all, or property held as a right for individual gratification? When the religious sentiment is appealed to to bless property and to declare its sacred-

Digitized by Google

ness, must not the question be asked, on what terms do you hold it and ask for the blessing? To quote an instance of the sort of result you sometimes get from this one-sided holding of the balance on the part of religion, I saw the other day that a man gravely and quite unconsciously alleged, as a reason for clearing his property of its inhabitants, that he was acting in accordance with the scriptural doctrine that "he could do what he liked with his own"! The scriptural doctrine! Is Isaiah's woe upon those "Who join field to field till there be no place for the poor man, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth" forgotten? Surely these are uncomfortable questions, but they are being more rudely and roughly asked than I ask them, and men are waiting for the answer we give. And alas! alas! for us if we repeat the old mistake, which cost the Church so dear in the past—"it is no concern of ours." Does not the rise of this movement, even in its undeveloped state, mean, my younger brethren, that the time is come for "judgment in the House of God"? In God's hands Socialism, with all its economic blunders and impossible schemes, may be a messenger to a Church that has been content to concern itself with individuals, and had no gospel for social questions. We are suffering everywhere from the tyranny of individualism. In social life, if ever it was true

Digitized by Google

"trahit sua quemque voluptas," it is true now; in commercial life unlimited competition has largely degraded trade into mere speculation, has destroyed the sympathetic relations of master and apprentice, is depriving labour of its dignity, is substituting for the old fellowship of craftsman and chief what has been called "the deep damnation" of the word "hands,"* has given to capital a power which is as bad for its possessors as for the victims of its oppression. In the theory of life which men unconsciously avow at every turn there is but one generally accepted standard of progress, and that is a material one. "We must live," it is said. Yes, live regardless of the warning which tells us so plaintively that "to get the means of living we lose life itself"—lose it, in that we empty it of everything that gives men self-respect in work and hope in trouble; lose it in that we keep it lonely, desolate to the end. "Behold your house is left unto you desolate," is the mournful legend written over every life that puts rights before duties, and is found in its day of trial with no sense of social obligations.

"What can we do, then?" you will say to me. I venture on one or two suggestions. We need to have restated, in a larger form than the conventional, the fact of our responsibility. Again and again we are reminded, and most usefully along with other things,

* Rev. E. Thring, late Head Master of Uppingham.

Digitized by Google

that we shall have to answer for ourselves at the day of judgment; it is the most solemn of truths. But does Christ encourage the notion that the account is to Him directly, or is it not through others? Is it not finding Christ or failing to find Him in other men that is the test? It is a great step when we recognize our responsibilities as members of the Kingdom—our duties of mutual service, the responsibilities to the society of which we are members, recognizing in each member the Head. It is a great thing when we recognize a higher duty than that of saving our souls, viz. that we must lose our souls to save them; that, to put it plainly, to *be* good is in some way to do good. And then, having recognized that, the next step is to see that your talents are the measure of your responsibilities. Look at them in that way, and you will begin right. We are not all set to do everything in the House of God, in the Father's family, but we are all set to do something, and our endowments point out the road. There is no escape from some share in the burden except at the price of desolation, but the burden is not all yours or mine. If the Church has every reason to go back to the primitive direction that every man has his διακονία, she may never forget, save at her peril, that there are "diversities of gifts and differences of administration." But with that caution I would say

Digitized by Google

most earnestly, try to make yourself feel that you are responsible for the social wrongs and shortcomings, for the desolation that follows them; try to bring home, to fasten on yourself, a sense of responsibility; try, in the way of self-repression of language, when you are tempted to follow the fatal fashion of the day, and call people who are not well dressed, a mob, or roughs, or degraded. Try to realize that it is your refusal to share advantages that has made them what they are. When you are chilled by the sight of animal degradation, or disgusted at the base methods that men use in noble causes, try to make yourself remember that you "are your brother's keeper;" that you must accept the charge of even these; that you are responsible for them because you know better; that you have your διακονία, and where might it have reached to if it had been properly exercised?

Again, if you would—and every one would—lend a helping hand, avoid, above all things, treating miseries, crimes, vices of manhood as the mere means of exciting your emotions. Nothing is so hurtful as a sensational way of treating such things—it empties men's sincerity out of them—nothing leaves Churches so desolate as the wave of sentiment provoked by some bitter cry. There are cries everywhere and always, bitter enough, but the ears with which to hear them are not the ears of excitement, but the ears of grief

Digitized by Google

and self-reproach and shame. Nothing is so dreadful as the spirit that can make an exciting spectacle out of a brother's shame. What right have we? Ah! when we look at our protected lives, when we look at the temptations we have dallied with, and then at their lives with their poisoned instincts, with their heritage of woe, with their degraded surroundings, is it not our conscience, not merely our pity, that needs awakening for their sin? What we want now is not excitable remedies or sensational situations, but the translation of our Creed into action, the renewed belief in the fellowship of the Body carried out in a practical fashion. There are earnests of such a movement here in the Oxford House in Bethnal Green and at Toynbee Hall; they are, on different lines, a most valuable translation of the mystical truth that we are members one of another, into an actual fact which men can understand. But they are only beginnings, the dawn, as I hope and trust, of a brighter day, when because those who have advantages prove their willingness to share them, and are earnest in their protests against a selfish individualism, the Church will be able to speak to movements like Socialism, and not seem to speak "in an unknown tongue." At present to the many the Church's Creed says one thing, and the more impressive voices of our actual lives, governed as they are to so large an

Digitized by Google

extent by an intense and tyrannical individualism, say another, and the "kingdom is divided against itself," and to us is the bitter shame and irreparable loss. And, yet, those to whom we look for guidance have nothing perhaps to offer but an ironical criticism of what they call our fanciful ideals, or the old cheerless lullaby, which says "it always has been, must be, and will be. You may imagine ideal states in which Christian fellowship will become a practical thing, but they remain visions." Ah! then, let them be your visions, for as one of the noblest of England's teachers,* just gone to his rest, has told us, it is the very promise of the latter days that "your young men shall dream dreams." Let us have visions, for visions are the blessings of the men of faith, of the men of insight. God grant us the double blessing, the blessing of a sense of our common responsibility, the grace to banish once and for ever the murderous plea, "Am I my brother's keeper?" the sense of our own share in every public wrong; and then, lest we despair, the blessing of the faith which is insight to see the Vision of Christ's Kingdom, and of the true methods of intensifying our oneness with it. We have not, let us remember, to construct a kingdom; we have not to bring new ideas and new lines of thought to bear on the distresses and

* E. Thring.

Digitized by Google

perplexities of nations. "We, having received a kingdom which cannot be moved," have only to rise to its essential spirit, to get back, in our dealing with all social questions, to that conception which was stamped once and for ever upon it by its Founder, by all that He was and did. For verily, "He took not on Him the nature of angels," so that, given some aërial elevation, He might give to the world some fragments of His wisdom; but "He took upon Him the seed of Abraham," and made the cares and weaknesses of mankind His own, as One "in all things like unto His brethren;" "He was made Flesh and dwelt among us," that He might have both knowledge and opportunity of service, that He might "know what was in man," and be remembered for ever by him not only as "King of kings and Lord of lords," but as One Whose greatness was shown most of all in that He was among men as "He that serveth."

Digitized by Google

# *THE BOOK OF JOB.*

"Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?"—JOB i. 7.

THE Book of Job, which we have been reading this morning, presents to us a vivid and striking picture of a very early civilization. Its authorship and date are unsolved problems, and the discussion of the one or the other would be unsuitable here; but this much is clear, that the Book of Job is not a Jewish book. It stands out from the Jewish Scriptures by the catholicity of its tone and spirit; its characters are not Jews; its scene is laid outside Palestine; its worship is that of the patriarchal age; it contains no single allusion to the Mosaic laws or customs, or to the characteristic beliefs of the Jews, or to the recorded events of their history. It has therefore been assigned to the patriarchal age with great probability, though its literary form is a distinct difficulty in the way of this hypothesis. But, however that may be, it has found its way to the hearts and

Digitized by Google

sympathies of modern peoples and times, perhaps more than any book in the Old Testament, more than even the records of the chosen people. It has been witnessed to in very various quarters as the work of a master spirit, guided by the sure instinct of genius. So unprejudiced a witness as Mr. Carlyle calls it "One of the grandest things ever written with pen, a noble book—all men's book; our first statement of the never-ending problem of man's destiny and God's way with him here on earth. Such living likenesses were never since drawn—sublime sorrow, sublime reconciliation, oldest choral melody as of the heart of mankind, so soft, so great as the summer midnight, as the world with its seas and stars. There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit." * And in spite of the difficulty which its literary form—the proverbial style—presents to its sequence and meaning being generally understood in its full sense, yet the vividness and naturalness of the story have a charm for all, while the absence of localization in its teaching, its superiority to any circumstances of time, have made its lessons seem to come home to simple people with a force and directness almost unequalled.

And yet it is a difficult book viewed from the intellectual side; it is not easy to read it with

* Carlyle's "Heroes: The Hero as Prophet."



Digitized by Google

intelligence and a clear conception of its meaning. It abounds, to begin with, in allusions to ancient modes of thought and forgotten speculations. Its long sequences of thought, its quick dialectic, are disguised and obscured by the limitations of its proverbial form, and, for us, by the inevitable imperfections which cleave to any, even the best translations. And it is the feeling one has that it might be, ought to be, so much more to people than it is, so much more precious not only in its detailed utterances, but in its general lesson, so much more instructive in spite of its difficulties, that leads me to speak of some of its features to-day.

Let us try, then, to grasp the leading motive,* the idea of the book. Even this is not easy. No doubt it means generally to lead us to look behind appearances, and so to understand the ways of God with man. No doubt its author felt that God's ways often needed justification—that, looked at merely from the outside and without sympathy or insight, they were difficult to interpret. There was upon him the heaviness and weight of the mystery which hides the ways of God, which the deepest natures feel most sensitively. Rough and ready explanations to the

* For the suggestion of this, and for some of the thoughts, I am indebted to some admirable and most instructive articles in the *Expositor*, vol. iv., on the "Book of Job."

Digitized by Google

effect that everything would come right somehow or somewhere, were felt by him and such as him to be no answer; the optimistic view that everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds was too shallow. Job had had an early, a fresh and beautiful, a childlike faith; he had believed in the goodness of God, and in that consciousness he had rest. The goodness of God had meant to him that God would be good, here and now and at once, to those who tried to serve Him. This faith he had had, and on it he had built his life. You often see the same thing now. Many of us envy the untried, untempted confidence of childlike faith, which has never had to face questions that are difficult to answer, and reposes without a pang or a doubt on its Father's bosom; some of our bitterest recollections, some scenes that never fade from our memory, are, perhaps, those when such a childlike trust has first received the blow that has sent it away bent and staggering. Ah! those old visions of a Father who could not disappoint, of a Love that was always, not merely believed in, but felt to be around, of the encircling of "the everlasting arms,"—surely the bitterest thing is the touch of undeserved sorrow that rudely shakes and disturbs those blissful visions. So we think, but we are blind; we know not what we say. That is not the "faith that receives the promises."

Digitized by Google

The burden and the heat of the day, the doubt and the anguish, must be borne. God "has many things to say to us," and to hear them we must go down into the pit, and grope and sigh and long so piteously, so earnestly for some little ray of light, but the end is the strength of manhood's faith; the end is the known Name, the felt blessing, even though the sinew be shrunk, even though we struggle through the nameless horrors of the night.

So it was with Job. The early stage of unquestioning belief in the perfect goodness of God, that God was good, and would therefore deal well with him, passed away; the next stage, in which the clouds that hide the mystery of God's Providence, the burden of this unintelligible world, was upon him. The age in which he lived made this stage a difficult one. There are many indications in the book that this age was one of transition, and an age of transition is always an age of growing scepticism, when current beliefs are called in question, when men can no longer be content with the moral and theological conceptions which have satisfied their fathers. More than once, when he is meeting the precise and formal orthodoxy of his three friends, Job seems to be uttering misgivings—misgivings which the thought of the day, to use our language, had before made him feel the force. There are traces, too, in Elihu's

Digitized by Google

words, of a "broader and more generous theology" * than that of the older friends, and there is not a little that is almost humorous in the way in which he puzzles himself to state his conclusions without giving offence to his elders. Job is indeed throughout the man who is conscious of his moral worth and the excellence of his intentions, struggling to find a theory which can explain the misfortunes which bewilder him. His friends represent in various degrees the old formula which assumed prosperity as the result of righteousness and adversity as the inevitable consequence of sin, and their endeavour to stretch this formula and make it cover the present case of a man whose righteousness is attested by God Himself, and who is yet so deeply afflicted, is the situation that strikes us first as the principal element in this story. But there is more in the poem than this—a higher and subtler meaning in it than merely to correct this old traditional view of the sequences of righteousness and sin. If we read the story through we see that there must be more in it than this, for in the end everything comes back to Job, "the Lord gave him twice as much as he had before." Now, if the only aim of the book had been to teach us that cruel losses and sorrows may be real blessings and are quite consistent with

* *Expositor*, article on "Book of Job," vol. iv. p. 16.

Digitized by Google

God's favour, its ending would do much to take the edge off the lesson. And for this reason, that it seems to teach that in the long-run righteousness leads a man to prosperity and sin to adversity, and if Job's friends had modified their formula to that extent, of saying that happy external conditions must be the ultimate result of observing the Divine law, it would have been sufficiently near the mark to have made it fit the instance. But there is much more in the Book of Job. There is a hidden meaning, much deeper, much more subtle—a problem hinted at again and again, though never explicitly stated, which goes to the very bottom of everything. There is something more suggestive than the notion that a tried and constant righteousness will lead men ultimately to a more stable and ample prosperity. "A door is opened in heaven." We see the King on His throne, we hear about God; we hear the adversary, the accuser—see him whose work it is to present men's actions in their worst light, that they may be thoroughly sifted. He himself has sunk into that evil condition; that he delights in making good men seem bad, in "reading vile motives into noble deeds." Self is his centre, and, selfish himself, he suspects in others a selfishness like his own. He cannot, will not, believe in an unselfish and disinterested goodness. When God challenges him to

Digitized by Google

find a fault in Job, he in turn challenges God to put Job to the proof, and he boldly affirms that Job only served God for what he could get. This challenge does not touch Job's goodness so much as it touches the honour of God. "For if the most pious of men is incapable of loving God for His own sake, then it follows that God is incapable of making Himself really loved, and, as no one is honoured except in so far as he is loved,"* this aspersion touches the very honour of God. God therefore Himself enters the lists. He undertakes Himself to prove that there is a man capable of a real and disinterested goodness, while Satan undertakes to prove that the best man's goodness is but a veiled selfishness. And this scene at the beginning gives us the key to the inner meaning of the book. It is meant to prove that God is capable of winning, and man capable of cherishing an unselfish and a disinterested goodness; that "Job can serve God for nought," that he can hold fast his confidence in God, even when his supreme Friend seems to have become for a while his enemy. This is what we may see in it, and it is its deepest lesson. But remember, of this Job himself was wholly unconscious. He could not know that he was a spectacle to men and angels; he could not know of the great issue which was to

* Godet.

Digitized by Google

be fought out in his own soul. Had he known that God was proving him through His own capacity of inspiring the highest devotion, his trial would have ceased to be a trial; he would cheerfully have borne anything, any misery by which God could be proved to be what he knew Him to be—by which it could be shown that He could inspire a disinterested love, and that man is capable of a real and unselfish goodness. But *we* can read the innermost teaching and the lesson of this remarkable work. No doubt it teaches us other things. It throws a light on the mystery of human life; it shows that its miseries are corrective, and not punitive, that the wrongs of time are to be redressed; but it has this deeper intention and purpose always behind, viz. to vindicate God and man at once, to show that, amid whatever doubts and perplexities and difficulties, Satan's taunt can be answered. "Job does serve God for nought." God is capable of inspiring a disinterested affection; man is able to rise to the heights of one—"though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

And, to bring it to ourselves, if anything can be certain, it is this—that we want to learn a good deal from the Book of Job; a good deal more than even the ordinary lesson that is drawn from it, viz. that we should not allow affliction to darken the face of heaven for us, or trace arbitrary connections between

Digitized by Google

sin and suffering. That is, no doubt a great lesson. What we want to fix in our minds is this, that Job's trial, Job's victory, Job's life, all mean this —that it is possible to love God for His own sake; that really to know Him as Job knew Him in the days of his prosperity, will keep a man's love true to Him in dark hours; and that this is what God cares for from man—a disinterested love. It teaches us something about God that makes Him more real to us as a Person with a heart. And is it not a great necessity with many of us to have God made real to us; that He should not be a Name, an influence, but a Person with a heart, Who longs to be loved, not for what He can give, but with a disinterested love? We can understand it surely when we look into ourselves, when we unconsciously analyze the love of others for us, and our resultant feelings. We are conscious of two quite different strata of affection—conscious of it in varying degrees according to our sensibility, though perhaps many of us never stop to analyze it. We are conscious of one sort of love, that it is bestowed for the sake of returns—a kind of investment. I do not mean in a vulgar way for direct tangible returns, but for the sake of what of interest, amusement, or self-esteem, or resultant satisfaction, it gets out of us. "It has its reward" emphatically, though whether that reward

Digitized by Google

comes to much in many instances, is very doubtful; but perhaps the reward is as much as inferior natures are capable of appreciating. It is not a species of affection which I can imagine any higher nature caring to be the object of. Its attitude is too obvious; "Pay me that thou owest," is its watchword; its levying of contributions is too insistent. It is always trying to force us to be different from ourselves; not that we may be our higher selves, but that we may pay its demands more plentifully. Some of us—a few I am sure, many I hope—have been and are conscious of the existence somewhere and in some other of a love that is as different from this as the sun is from a candle; a love that loves us for what we are, faults, imperfections, and limitations and drawbacks and all, and yet would fain see us be our higher selves, and live our truest lives at any cost of sacrifice to itself. That is the love that at once shames and yet makes us grow, that is a rest, a repose, "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." A very deep and long friendship, an appreciation of the same great aims and motives of life, often produces this feeling between two men. David felt it when he looked into Jonathan's dead face and knew what he had lost: "Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." Those who have it know that they have a treasure beyond all others; they feel about it differ-

Digitized by Google

ently from anything else which the world may give or take away. It is at once the most exquisite humiliation and the purest joy to be loved for our own sake. The Book of Job sets God's seal on the greatness and the beauty of this disinterested love. It shows how God Himself longs for it; how it is the very crown of a life of service; how its offering is the one thing that proves His own goodness to be so perfect, because it is the highest tribute man can pay.

That God wants to be loved for His own sake—"not for the hope of gaining aught," but for His own sake—that the highest testimony that man can pay to the goodness of God is to try to love Him for Himself, for being what He is, is the deepest lesson of the Book of Job. That man did and can endure crosses and miseries for which he can see no explanation, and yet look up into the Father's face and say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him"—this is the consolation that comes to us from those far-off years in that touching story. To this higher conception of religion, not as a mere round of duty, still less as a mere emotional paroxysm which sets a man at ease about his own future prospects, but to this higher conception of a love that can love God for His own sake, for being what He is, viz. ideal goodness; that can rise through all that is good and holy and true in man, and realize the unrevealed Beauty

Digitized by Google

and the perfect Goodness;—to this I believe and trust that God is leading many around us. Systems around us are being tried; institutions are being tested; Churches put to the proof; but through much confusion this remains. The problem is becoming ever plainer. Can man love God for His own sake? God, no doubt, still often hides Himself. There are clouds and darkness about His path as in the days of Job; difficulties hide Him from the half-hearted; their rules and systems practically blind men while they think they are defending Him, just as they blinded Job's friends; but amid it all God is winning that which man is freely giving—the love and the trust which, not once only, but always, wherever bestowed, in however humble a sphere, gladdens the Father's heart and silences the voice of the enemy.

Digitized by Google

## *GOD'S JUDGMENT AND OURS.*

"The righteous judgment of God."—ROM. ii. 5.

GOD'S judgment! This is the one overwhelming thought of Advent Sunday—that which is the great fact of the present and the great event of the future; that judgment which ever is summing up all things, and will one day be openly declared; that judgment which ignores no life however obscure, no detail however trifling, which has its eye open to all causes, all persons, all things;—the great daily, hourly fact. For God's judgment is not merely in its open declaration the great event of the future; it is the one thing that really matters, that really concerns us in the present—the one thing that need trouble us, and yet the one thing that comforts us. What men think or say, it is nothing in comparison with this; what God thinks of us, how we stand before Him, it is everything! And what a difference it makes about our own judgments! We have to judge in a manner, not

Digitized by Google

finally, but because we must judge; we have to pass our judgments. Often we cannot escape from it, and we have to pass them under the pressure of this conviction—that *what we are judging, God is judging.*

Let us take the two thoughts in succession.

I. God, then, is judging at every stage ourselves, our interests, our occupations, our use and abuse of what we use and what we have, our attitude to people and things and causes around us. Not only here, but everywhere; "Ye stand this day every one of you before the Lord your God." What we come to this place for, what we are here, what we do here, what we mean here, what we forget in this place and what we remember; what we are when we go away into our families, curses or blessings, helps or hindrances; what we are when we go into the darkness of night, into the silence of our chamber alone with Him, with Whom the darkness is no darkness—God is judging—not only the result, but the processes, the tendencies and judging according to righteousness. And God's judgment means separation, even within ourselves, not only as we sometimes fear condemnation, but κρίσις, separation between the good that He watches for and tends so lovingly—the tears of repentance, the struggles, the anguish, the brave resolution, and, on the other hand, the wretched compromises, the impotent fall, the dull,

Digitized by Google

flat, unprofitable weariness with self. Don't let us miss the help it gives us. God judges between the two selves within our self, the self that has grown from the seed cast into us by Him, and that other self—that self that rebels and wars and often seems to triumph. We must cry out sometimes if we realize this, not only "Enter not into judgment," but "Judge me, O Lord my God, according to Thy righteousness, and let not mine enemy"—the enemy within the gates—"triumph over me." "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart; look well if there be any way of wickedness within me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

There are times when we are misunderstood and misconceived; then we instinctively appeal to this judgment. The sensitive "heart that knows its own bitterness" carries its burden to Him to Whom "all things are naked and open;" but, ordinarily, do we think what it is to know that God is for ever judging, separating, and, if we will let Him, purifying? If it is a humbling thought, it is surely one full of a most blessed and unspeakable comfort.

And then, not only ourselves, but all causes, all things around, God is judging. Eternal righteousness is at work in these complex surroundings of ours, in what men are doing, in the causes for which they are struggling—separating between causes, and even

Digitized by Google

between the evil and the good in causes, severing the good from the evil, purifying causes through the sufferings of individuals. We get so perplexed sometimes at the mixtures that present themselves to us—a noble cause disfigured by foul and unworthy means, a bad cause burnished up by the utter sincerity of its advocates. Or we are half maddened at tales of woe and suffering, or brutal wrong, or savage injustice—mad at our own impotence. We gnash our teeth; if only we could set things right, if only we could recall men to just principles. And still the wrong goes on, and we subside into sullen rage or silent despair. No one cares, we say, and yet all the time, silent, calm, unmoved, ever separating, ever disentangling, God's judgment moves on, a great and lovely stream of righteousness, correcting, guiding, restraining: *semper agens, semper quietus*—always at work, yet ever at rest. Does not the voice almost break in upon us sometimes, "O ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt?" "Out of weakness men are made strong, out of suffering made perfect." Is not the end of all the throes and struggles and cataclysms of chaos now and ever the same? "God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good."

And when we turn away from ourselves and things around that puzzle us, to our brother man, God

Digitized by Google

is judging him, will judge him, does judge him righteously. How heavily weighted he often seems to be! What chance is there for him? No good influences; nothing but poisoned instincts, inherited vileness; no moral training. What a mystery it seems to be when we withdraw ourselves from considering his brutality or his ignorance, and remind ourselves that he is here on his trial, being put to the proof; that he was sent here by Infinite Love, with his criminal face and his heritage of woe; that for him the Son gave up His life; that for him the Spirit came! He seems to have no chance; neither the Church nor Dissent can reach his ear; he listens unmoved to the most solemn warnings of reverent minds, and to the most grotesque parodies of Christianity; he is affected by neither one nor the other; he seems to have no interest, no mind for anything except what gratifies self. Can it be true, as Calvinism asserts, that he, with his scanty opportunity, is sent here with a sentence pre-written against him in heaven? Can it be true that, even if he were to struggle, his case is hopeless? That cannot surely be. Well, then, where is the explanation of such lives—of such awful possibilities in human nature as we see around us? Where are we to look for any road out of the terrible haunting notion that pursues us, that the Cross is a failure as judged by the words of Him who hung



Digitized by Google

thereon, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me"? Oh, then we thank God really that there is a wider judgment than ours—a judgment that can see behind appearances into reality; a righteous judgment ever at work among them as among us; a separating judgment, a discerning of the thoughts and intentions; a judgment that "breaks no bruised reed and quenches no smoking flax,"—the righteous judgment of God. What an intense and inexpressible comfort amid the inequalities, the misfortunes, the down-grade tendencies that make us so wretched, it is to remember that the same thought of God's daily, hourly, judgment, which gives to the lives of us who realize it something of a sense of awe, is our one ground of hope for those whose case, as we see it, were otherwise hopeless! That God sees everything that is possible to be said in mitigation of, and to account for the awful wickedness which shocks us, and the helpless impotence which perplexes us because it seems to have no choice but to be wicked; that God is ever separating within man between the good he would do and the evil that he hates while he does it; that Christ Himself, because He is the Son of man, the embodiment of Humanity, understands each case; that it stands vivid and real before Him, marked with all its natural limitations and hereditary drawbacks, the object of His perpetual

Digitized by Google

Intercession, the passion of His Heart; that while He judges He loves, while He separates within each He cherishes the tiniest spark of upward flame;—this is the one sure rock of fact on which we can rest amid the seething perplexities that surround us.

Yes, God judges, and we tremble as we think of our sins, our thoughtlessness, our wretched weak yielding; but God judges, and we rejoice, we are comforted, when we think of those whom no voice of ours can reach, no vision of ours can comprehend—that helpless impotence, that defiling weakness, that incapacity for religious feeling that seems if it had no chance and no hope. "Not a sparrow falls to the ground but He knows it"—He the Father of all. Are not these far dearer to Him than the helpless little birds that perish in the cold?

II. And then I pass on to the other point. The thought of this perpetual stream of the righteous judgment of God, which nothing can disturb or perplex or confuse, which comforts while it awes us, ought to influence us in our judgments. While God is judging, we are judging. How inexpressibly awful if our judgments are contradicting His! How if the great, sweet, clear-toned voice in heaven is saying, "This is My beloved son accepted in the Beloved," and we with our jeering, excited, heated voices are shouting, "Away with such a fellow from the earth;

Digitized by Google

it is not fit that he should live"? What if God sees a martyr, a sufferer for his weak and starving brethren, where we in our anxiety for our own safety, *i.e.* in our selfishness, in our nervous fears about what we have got and want to keep, only see a criminal who has got his deserts? Is there not a fear that we, with all our advantages, and all our good traditions and our protected bringings up—is there not fear that we may be contradicting God in our judgments?

It is so difficult, we say; perhaps it were better never to judge at all. The Bible says a good deal about not judging; it were better to leave everything in solution, never to call anything evil or good. No, there is no escape that way; we must judge between good and evil in action. The Bible only warns us against judging of what is beyond our province, *e.g.* motives and results beyond our ken, but we must judge righteous judgment about action; we shall fail miserably of effecting anything to make the moral atmosphere purer and clearer if we do not. We must use our God-given power to discern, and to give utterance to our discernment. Not to condemn wrong is perhaps the most wrong thing we can do, and whatever else besides condemnation may be said about a wrong action, we are in no position to say it until we have said that it is wrong. However slow and careful our judgments may be, judge we must.

Digitized by Google

But those of us who are conscious of the judgment of God, and of the contrasts that are possible between our judgments and His, judge with a difference, with a perpetual sense of incompleteness, expressed or not, with no idea of finality or exhaustiveness. It is that impression of reserve in the judgments of the best men that gives to them their real weight; they judge with hesitation as not knowing all the facts, and so they cannot stop in condemnation merely. To condemn, to accumulate commonplaces on the viciousness of vice, has but little weight. It must be done, no doubt, at times, but every time is not the time for it. It must be done for this reason that we cannot let badness alone, for "bad people ask nothing more of good people than to let them alone." But to stop in condemnation, to refuse to pass to any other points of view about character than that covered by the faults it presents, is a false, an inhuman attitude; it does not become us men. It gives us, in the case of others, that sense of disappointment we experience when we finish a book of history which tries to prove that all the good people were on one side, all the bad on the other—such a work, say as Macaulay's History, leaves us disappointed. In spite of the charm of his writing, there is a sense of incompleteness in our mind, though there is definiteness enough. Sentence has been passed, every one has been sent to

Digitized by Google

join the sheep or the goats, but we feel that his scope was too narrow, his tests too one-sided, and we long to hear another side. So it is with our moral judgments. It has been well put lately in the most thoughtful of our weekly papers.* "The vibration that makes up the physical universe has its place in the spiritual world. The motion that creates light for the outward eye is no less needed for the eye of the soul. We cannot be really satisfied, if there is any truth of feeling in us, with condemnation; we cannot refuse to pass to other points of view—to see from one end of the swing an action as an instance of misery appealing to compassion, while we see it from the other as an instance of wrong calling for judgment. Either point of view taken alone is wrong, because incomplete. The law of balanced movement is as true in the moral and mental as in the physical world. From no point of view can you take an adequate view of the moral bearings of one single character. You have to depend on successive moments of vision, you have to leave unchangeableness to God in your judgments as in all else, and to remember that we are creatures of a time-world, and only through a time-world gaining a vision of eternity in all our judgments."

This, then, is the great lesson of Advent Sunday.

* The *Spectator*.

Digitized by Google

Remember, while we live, act, worship, judge, God judges. This thought will keep our lives true; this will help us to avoid the awful possibility of contradicting that higher judgment that is ever at work. This thought will keep us from making amiable excuses for evil, because we know that nothing can be worse than to merely excuse evil in others, nothing except to rob them of any hope by mere indiscriminate condemnation. We need the warning, every one of us, which the thought of God's perpetual judgment brings; we need the warning, the restraint which it brings to ourselves; we need the comfort, the sense of support that its separating work brings, when we are conscious of two selves, or when we look upon the perplexing mysteries of human life around us; we need the reserve it imposes on us in uttering our own judgments, the corrective that it applies to our natural tendency to stop in condemnation, to ignore any other point of view. "The righteous judgment of God." May the thought of it strengthen and not depress, restrain and not crush our whole thinking and active life, so that we may do something more this Advent than before, to fulfil our place here till we pass to surrender our trust to Him at the foot of His everlasting Throne!

Digitized by Google

## *LIFE THROUGH DEATH.*

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."—ST. JOHN xii. 24.

ST. JOHN has traced Christ's ministry through a succession of scenes of conflict with the Jews up to a crisis—a crisis at which all those around Him were full of expectation. The raising of Lazarus had raised popular enthusiasm to a high pitch; the enemies who had opposed Him so long were at last apparently tired, out of heart, convinced of failure. "Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing?" they said; "behold, the world is gone after Him." From the great intellectual world outside Israel, the world which He had not touched, the other sheep whom He had deliberately left, the first cry for help had come: "Sir, we would see Jesus," was the request of the Greeks to Philip. The hour was come that the Son of Man should be glorified—glorified somehow, in some way. But how? Every one around Him

Digitized by Google

is full of expectation. He is going to set up the kingdom—to claim the sovereignty of the world. He is going to expel the Roman intruder; to assert again the ancient glory of Israel; to repeat over the Roman eagle the old triumph over Syria, and Moab, and Egypt, and Assyria. There is a stirring all round Him, an expectant movement of excited feelings, like that which runs through an army when it waits for the word of command which shall hurl it against the foe. He is going to speak, to use some sign, and to perform some convincing miracle which will cause all opposition to melt away, which will rally priest and Pharisee alike to His side, and enrol the Sanhedrin itself among His disciples. "He will blow with the trumpet, and gather together the dispersed from the ends of the earth." This, or something like this, was what they expected. As usual, there is disappointment for them. It was always so with the Jews; their minds and expectations were out of tune with His Life. And so He opens His mouth, and the announcement comes; a great principle founded on a natural law, but a principle that deals a death-blow to the trembling expectations around Him—a principle that must have come like an iceberg to dull their enthusiasm and nip their expectations in the bud. No splendid triumph of force, no display of supernatural power on a public

Digitized by Google

stage with convincing effects, no spectacle of Messiah as the King of Angels attended by His hosts, crushing down opposition by their fiery swords; nothing but a grave, measured announcement of a deeply rooted principle—a principle that tells how the Kingdom shall come and the Will be done, but tells it in a parable; a principle which, instead of stirring up a fresh enthusiasm or taking advantage of an existing one, sent men away to think, and weigh, and ponder, and consider, in order to see its bearings; a principle which, if they have eyes to see and ears to hear, must bring them to this reflection, "We have been all wrong. We have been expecting temporal blessings, limiting our horizons at best to deliverance from temporal evil—expecting this, too, in the wrong way by a signal act of Divine interposition, such as that which in the early days overtook Pharaoh in the Red Sea. We have been all wrong about Him and about ourselves, about the way the kingdom would come. It is to follow the natural law, to come through the power of suffering, and apparent failure; through no outward achievement, no splendid triumph over natural forces; it is to come by that power of suffering to which nature bears witness as being the law of fruitfulness." This was what they might have learnt if they had been able to catch the spirit of Christ; as it was, there was but one here and there

Digitized by Google

that could even remotely grasp the meaning of an announcement so strange and enigmatic, so contrary to all their preconceived notions.

And yet here is, what for us and to all time remains, the announcement of the real law of fruitfulness. It is what nature enforces—toil and suffering and apparent death first, and then the harvest. All nature's laws are but shadows of eternal laws, which we more or less perfectly can see even now; and just as the food we eat comes by the hand of nature that toils and struggles, just as the golden corn and the flowers scattered through meadows are the result of nature's throes and pangs, just as through death it is that her abundant life comes, so it is in the world at large—no power comes but on condition of suffering, and the only real power is that which comes out of suffering. We look at the big battalions of nations that can put two millions of men into the field, and we say there is power; and power it is of a certain sort, though even then it looks stronger than it is. But take it as being power; it is power that comes from national self-repression, from the suffering of a compulsory military service which withdraws every man from his natural occupation, to the toil and hardship of a camp life of regular discipline and enforced strictness. It is the same law; a nation wants power of that kind, and

Digitized by Google

she can have it, but she must pay the price in the toil and suffering of her manhood. So that when Christ, in His supreme announcement at this supreme moment, lays down the law, He is echoing an eternal truth, He is enunciating a law by which all human life and all man's success are bounded and conditioned. And no supernatural intervention, no display of spiritual chariots and horses, no sudden claim enforced by such means, could have worked so powerfully, in the long-run, on men as this simple grave announcement, which staggered and chilled those who heard it, and sent them away blinded and hardened and unhealed.

For those of us who want to sit at the Master's feet and learn the deepest lessons; for men who are sick and weary and tired of mere empty outward demonstration—who want to look behind the appearance into the reality of things; for those who do not believe much in mere talk that leads to nothing, but have a profound belief in work that costs trouble and effort; who do not believe in mere force, in mere putting down, but believe in trying to understand; who believe, not in the policeman's baton, but in sympathetic consideration of men's wrongs;—Christ's words are ever proving themselves over and over again, doing for them two great things—teaching them and consoling them, giving light in

Digitized by Google

darkness, consolation in difficult places. The law of fruitfulness is again and again seen to be apparent loss, suffering, toil, throes, labour. There are no short cuts, no splendid achievements without painful foundations, no gains without risks; the law of sacrifice runs through everything. The seed is there in each man's life, a certain power cast into him, as it were, by God. But it is with this, as with a natural grain of corn. The grain left to itself, what is it? A seed capable of giving, if ground up, an infinitesimal portion of nourishment, but left alone, it remains unproductive; presently it dies, and out of its death comes abundance of life. So with the seed cast into man's life by God. Kept for man's self, hidden away, isolated, it is useless or nearly so; it must toil, suffer, die, if it is to give forth much fruit. And this is true even where we less expect it—in the world of intellectual as well as of moral effort. I know that in the intellectual world gifts seem very unequally proportioned, the seed seems to vary in its original deposit very much more than it actually does. We look at a man and say, What brilliant gifts, talents, genius! The longer we look the more we see that power of genius and talent largely consists in power of self-denial and industry. The man who endures most and strives most and toils most is for the most part the man of genius. "Genius is patience," said a

Digitized by Google

brilliant Frenchman, with something, no doubt, of a desire to express the thought that without hard work and patient endurance no man will ever bring his natural gifts to perfection. No doubt natural gifts count for something, but the highest natural gifts—how piteously we have seen it exemplified sometimes! —without self-denial, without the power of working while others are playing, without enduring hardship, abide alone, never effect anything. Only through discipline of toil and suffering did even the genius of Shakespeare and Bacon bring forth much fruit. So, too, as regards influencing others as a teacher, whatever truth a man may have to contribute to the enlightenment and advancement of his fellow-creatures, be it moral, or spiritual, or scientific, or historical, or mathematical, he will teach it to some effect just so far as he has toiled, agonized over it till he has made it his own. Otherwise, be he clergyman or layman, he may seem to teach, but there is no power behind his words; he may be a glib utterer of other men's deep thoughts, or a purveyor of emotional sensation, like the teller of some gruesome tale; he may play upon the emotions of the half-educated, and serve to while away the vacant hours of the idler, but he will never really teach men to know and love and value what he has not first by toil and industry and patience made his very own

Digitized by Google

—his own in such a way that it is part of his being, wrought into it by the toils and troubles, the heartaches and headaches of long weary hours; only if in this way truth dies, as it were, within him will it bring forth much fruit.

Now, all this was true—had been true ever since the world began. Unconsciously, every great teacher every leader of noble enterprise, from Samuel to Isaiah, from Moses to Maccabeus, had worked upon these lines. But Christ's words brought out this great law which had animated all that was best in mankind—brought it under human consciousness, so to speak, and enabled men to look on it and see its truth everywhere. He saw men drifting into mere worship of brute force, rushing into false enthusiasms or mere struggles for personal ascendency, or for the ascendency of race over race; He saw their highest hopes concentrated on a supreme exhibition of that kind; He saw the religious feelings of men and women being preyed upon by formalists, with rules and prohibitions and externalisms as they have been in every age; and He says gravely, decisively, "That is not the law of the kingdom of God at all, that is not a true principle; the only true principle is to sacrifice self that you may bring forth much fruit;" and, having said so, He passed on to the Cross, to sneers, and shame, and suffering, and blood, to

Digitized by Google

emphasize and deepen His lesson. Only in pain and sorrow could even His pure and spotless life bring forth much fruit. Strange that it should be so; only the Cross, only the Agony, convinces the world of the truth of His Life. And it is well for us if we note this, as a rule, in every department of our life, moral, spiritual, as well as intellectual—no result without effort, no fruit without pain, no usefulness without self-sacrifice. If you want to be a bit of use; if you want to live for anything except food and drink and sleep—like a pig or a cow—you must submit to this great law of fruitfulness; no result without patient industry, no fruit without pain, no usefulness to others, no power even of teaching and bringing up little children, without sacrifice of self. Ay, and in your own deepest self, if you would know the rapturous sense of life "unto God," if you would experience the glow of new birth unto righteousness and read into nature all its highest meanings, and rejoice in goodness, and purity, and love, and virtue with that keen rapturous movement of joy which we call love of righteousness, and, in its highest form, love of God;—if in your deepest self you would know this, you must illustrate the same law, go through the same experience; you must "die unto sin;" you must "crucify the old man." And crucifixion is a slow, painful, weary death, a conquering of evil lusts

Digitized by Google

and passions that do not easily surrender, a throwing away resolutely the husks that you may find the grain, a stern resolute effort at commanding your temper and your tongue; but, so it is, you must die if you would bring forth much fruit. What is the secret of that winning power that makes goodness so lovable in some of God's servants—that charm that brings forth much fruit? Surely it is no matter of temperament. It is gained in the awful hours of struggle with well-nigh over-mastering temptation, in the dreary moments of self-discipline and self-humiliation, in the often deaths of their daily life, in the sustained fatigue and weariness of long communion with God; there is the dying grain in their lives that had the promise and shows the result. "Except it die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The curse of selfishness is solitude and desolation. The old selfish man who lives for heaping together money, what a monument he is of solitary selfishness!

Brethren, let us learn this lesson and never forget it. Let us not complain of the trials which duty brings to us. Our moral strength lies in bracing ourselves again and again to hard, unwelcome duty. Our spiritual strength lies in offering to God that which costs us something; coming, *e.g.*, to early Communion, thus sanctifying the whole of Sunday; in



Digitized by Google

putting off other things to read our Bibles and say our prayers ; in resolute secret struggles to know God better and understand Him more ;—in these, and not in mere emotional and hysterical, sentimental talk about religion, about our feelings, or about the fringe of religious questions, lies our real strength. We have to bear the burden and heat of the day. The vineyard lies there, the Church of God ; we must do our work in it, or project ourselves into a miserable solitude outside it. Sadly and wearily we go forth, it may be, to the old efforts, old struggles, "bringing forth precious seed ;" but go we must back to the old struggles, renewed self-denial, or never shall it be true of us that we "come again and bring our sheaves with us." Lonely and barren in life we shall be, and yet more lonely and barren in death. Only one safety is there—to throw ourselves into the death, the toil, the weariness, the self-sacrifice of moral and spiritual effort ; then, wherever our place be, however humble our sphere, however desolate our sense of failure, we shall bring forth much fruit.

A merely ornamental Christianity, a Christianity of mere talk and profession, of being shocked at sin and of doing nothing to help sinners, of mere respectability, the world has looked at and said good-bye to and said it, too, without regrets ; but a Christianity that, holding firm to the Spirit and Life of Christ,

Digitized by Google

shall exercise itself in the power of blessing others—a Christianity that has learnt from its Master the law of fruitfulness, the power of self-sacrifice, has yet its work to do in our generation, and its far greater wonders in the generations that are yet to come.

Digitized by Google

# *DAVID.*

"David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that He commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."—I KINGS xv. 5.

IT would be difficult to say how much we English Churchmen owe to the fact that the Bible is an open book to us—that we can more and more clearly discern by study both God's dealings with those of old, and the Life of Christ and of His Apostles. We are enabled thereby, to mention only one thing, to grasp the Christian spirit in a way impossible to those who know but little of His Life, or only hear it read in another language. And yet that the Bible has been abused for all sorts of purposes, no one can deny; used to establish unwarrantable inferences, and even doubtful morality. The truth is, that the Bible is the most unguarded of all books, the last book to be treated as a book of charms; a book which, while its plainest lessons are on the surface,

Digitized by Google

demands real study, and the key of a devout and intelligent appreciation; an easy book, and yet a difficult book; a book to be read and studied, not as though it were a dictionary of theological terms which would give you an answer, clear, rounded off, on every question that might be raised, but reverently, intelligently, with due consideration that it was written during long centuries, to all sorts of people in every stage of material progress, from barbarism onwards. For it begins with the history of human life plunged into darkness, and gives the history, in the Old Testament, of the gradual emergence of one nation out of a state of barbarism. And even much of the New Testament was written in view of different controversies that in their letter are long dead—*e.g.* the Epistles to the Colossians and Galatians were so written, and written with a sole and particular view of the conduct of Christians under these controversies—so that even the New Testament cannot be used to settle directly questions that were not before the writers. How piteously some Christians failed to grasp this! They quote particular texts as decisive of questions which the writers of those texts could never have even dimly considered.

On quite another side, it is needless to say that the coarser sort of infidel lecturers have not been slow to perceive and avail themselves of this weapon

Digitized by Google

of using the Bible as though it were a dictionary of theological and moral science, which has been suggested to them by the pious and devout. They have revelled in proving that the Bible approves of adultery, murder, and drunkenness, because of certain texts in which those who have been guilty of these sins have been otherwise commended. How often, for instance, has this text been quoted as it appears in one passage without its qualifying words, and the assertion that "David was a man after God's own heart" been used to discredit the Old Testament morality and weaken its claims! And I am afraid we must sorrowfully admit that, while it is the want of insight on the part of Christians which has presented this weapon to the enemy, the want of real interest and sympathetic study of the Bible has prevented others from being able to answer it. When the main facts of the Bible are more widely and intelligently grasped, such weapons will cease to have any power. The purpose, *e.g.*, of the Old Testament, where it is historical, is very much more to record facts, than to comment upon them, still less to harmonize them with other facts. Grasp that, and you will be but little disturbed by those who seek to discredit it by representing its statements as though they were final judgments, or had any ulterior purpose to secure. If the Bible had been written merely to establish

Digitized by Google

a system, the writers would have been much more careful to harmonize discrepancies and to put in qualifications; it might have lent itself less easily to perversion or to misrepresentation, but it would have lost immeasurably; it would not have been the Book of human nature that it is. God's revelation of Himself and His ways, His dealings with His people, would have been less really likely to chain our hearts and attention, had it come to us in a series of neatly balanced statements and judicial summings-up of character, than it does when it comes to us under the records of lives like those of David and Elijah, and Abraham and Jacob. Their lives are set before us as they were lived; all their weaknesses are told as well as their virtues—not to establish a theory, but to illustrate the working itself out through them of the Providence of God.

To read in this way a life like David's is really useful and luminous. It really tells us about the man as he was, and whatever there is of teaching or warning about his life comes out in this way of telling with a reality that comes home to us. If David had had his Lingard, like Mary Queen of Scots, to write his life; if he had had an advocate, a partisan; or if he had fallen into the supreme misfortune of having his life written by a writer like Mr. Froude;—then his story would have become the

Digitized by Google

mere stalking-horse of partisanship. He would have been treated as Cromwell and Luther have been by writers on either side. Compare, *e.g.*, the estimates of Cromwell made by Professor Mozley and by Carlyle; to the one he is a profligate hypocrite, to the other a hero. So would David have been treated if he had been so unlucky as to have lived in a period when he would have had his life written by a secular historian—in an age when religious or social prejudices could have been brought to bear on him; it would have been easy to extol him to the skies, to have ignored his crime, to have palliated it by the necessities of high policy; or it would have been, perhaps, more tempting to prove that he was a consistent hypocrite. Or he might have fallen into the hands of one of those distinguished writers of later periods who, weary of the special pleading of partisans, endeavour to strike a balance between evil and good in the characters they depict, and generally leave us with a very imperfect idea of what they were like at all—whose one object seems to be to prove that a man's good was not so good, or his evil not so evil as was popularly supposed. Surely theirs is a very useless and a very misleading style of treatment, which really assumes for human nature powers of summing up that it does not possess. So that truly we cannot help being thankful that David was not

Digitized by Google

left to a partisan or a philosopher either to describe his remarkable character or to enforce its moral. His life is told us naturally, but we feel truly. Whoever wrote the Book of Kings sets down naught in malice, nor does he extenuate, nor does he weigh good acts against evil ones; he leaves the story to speak for itself, and even where, as in the text, there is an attempt at summing up, the blot on his life is stated and left. There is no attempt made to weigh good and evil. It is not said, in the arbitrary fashion of would-be modern moralists, that a man could not be good and do that; nor is there any palliation attempted—the thing is left in its unvarnished nakedness to speak for itself. David did fight for God, work for God, love God; but David did also violate the plainest laws of society for his own selfish ends. There are two sets of facts about him, and while text-history, like text-theology, may choose to ignore one and only dwell on the other, the sacred writer is very clear in his method—no attempt at harmony is made, the whole story is left, with its naked contrast, to the consciences and hearts of those who read it.

It may sound strange, but I am sure that it is true to say that this very quality in the sacred writer is what gives to this story of David's life the power which it has over the hearts and consciences of men. David's life has taught those whom no cooked

Digitized by Google

biography, no fulsome eulogy, no elaborate constructive attempt at harmonizing two sides of life, would ever have reached. It has a power of its own; it has an interest which, perhaps, no other Biblical character, save One, has excited. For some, for the simpler sort, it has an interest even beyond that of St. Paul.

It speaks so to the consciences of men, where nothing is extenuated or balanced or weighed against other things, but a story like his is simply told. If there had been a hint of apology for his crimes, or of trying to prove him a hypocrite because he wrote some of the Psalms and yet was a murderer, the appeal would have lost all its force. But, told as it is, it goes straight to the moral sense of man and bids him face facts in others and in himself, and be true about them. It says quite plainly that in David there were two characters, not one, two men, not one; and that between these two, between David fighting for God, confident of God's righteousness, and David sacrificing the plainest laws of society for his own selfish ends, there is no reconciliation. Man's own conscience must find the lesson, and it is one that strips off the sham and unreality of much of our way of judging or seeming to judge. We cannot be honest and feel ourselves honest, and get rid of it by saying either that David was a hypocrite, or that his

Digitized by Google

sin didn't matter. We might argue it in either of these ways if it were put as it would have been by a partisan writing his life, but, coming as it does as a plain, unvarnished record, we have to own that the solution is a deeper one, viz. that David's is a mixed character, or, if you like, that there are two Davids, the one fighting for God, longing for God, quite earnest and quite sincere; and the other, the David who planned for his own pleasure another's death. And so we are to look at him, we are to admire his faithfulness and to hate his sin; but we cannot—and it is so good for us to see it—declare that his sin did not matter, or that his goodness was unreal. David's life, as it is told us, is a great warning about our judgments. It warns us that the narrow, hopeless sort of judging which condemns men and women wholesale, because of one great fault, because of some serious blot in character—which calls all their religious acts hypocrisy, because there is some grave fault in them,—is unreal and untrue to the most patent facts of human nature.

It is, of course, possible that there may be hypocrites, there may be persons attending Christian Churches whose religious practices are assumed for special and unworthy ends, there may be actual Tartuffes around us, but beyond the fact that we have no possible means of deciding that this is so in

Digitized by Google

any given case, there remains the undoubted law of human nature, viz. that inconsistencies that are glaring enough to the eyes of others do not present themselves to those who are guilty of them in the same light, and that it is possible to have great and really deep religious longings, and yet not to be strong enough to conform one's whole life to them. St. Paul's experience of a war going on in his members, which caused even him such agony, is always possible, and we miss the real force and lesson of lives which present great moral contrasts, when we dismiss them either with a sneer as hypocrites, or say that their faults do not matter. What they really teach us as a warning is the terrible possibility of self-deception; the way in which, when a man wants to sin, he can weave a web of flowery arguments thick enough to justify himself—to enfeeble his sight so that he scarcely believes, after a time, that it was he who did what he did. There is not always a Nathan to say, "Thou art the man," but sooner or later, if any spark of good remains, we may be sure that the wrong-doer will be brought face to face with the truth; that he himself will be filled with shame, as his arguments are swept away like clouds before the sun. Meanwhile, let us be quite sure of this—that to understand so complex, so mysterious a power as conscience is, is not the work of a day or

Digitized by Google

a year; that strange, incomprehensible dualisms do exist in other personalities besides David; that there are times when men seem to have two selves, and to do things as mutually inconsistent as possible, and yet to be quite unconscious of their absolute and hopeless inconsistency; and that perhaps one of the best and kindest things we ever do is when, seeing this, we leave off calling people hypocrites and give them credit for the good in them, and, on the other hand, act bravely and boldly the part of Nathan, and wipe away the flimsy excuses and hold up the real account of their actions to their faces, and while we do this do not count them utterly hopeless—see that there is still the other self, not to be reconciled to, or harmonized with, or balanced against the evil self, but the other self which in time, as in David's case, may throw off the vileness and blackness, and be seen to be the real man after all.

And if this comforts us about others, perhaps it may help us sometimes to understand ourselves. When we are conscious of that fatal duality within ourselves, of a consciousness that, while in heart and soul and will we are striving after one kind of life, we are very often doing things inconsistent with it—things in which we hardly seem to recognize ourselves, in which we almost doubt our identity until some day the conviction comes, "Thou art the man;"

Digitized by Google

the thing didn't do itself—you did it;—when it is thus with us, and self-respect is tottering and we are tempted to despise ourselves; or, on the other hand, while we are trying to persuade ourselves that some sin is a necessity, though, in reality, all sin is separation from God; or when we are thinking, perhaps, that we had better be wholly bad and so arrive at some consistency, and repeating some commonplace about not, at any rate, being hypocrites, and pretending to be one thing while we are another, then I think David's life may speak to us. After all, which was the real man, the true self? Was it the man who forgot his manhood, or the man who humbled himself before God; the man who fell so grievously into selfishness, or the man who was so tender and gentle with his rebellious son; the man who forgot God, or the man who sought Him so earnestly and longingly, and has given millions their highest words with which to seek Him? Let us be true about sin, but let us never give way to the vile suggestion that, because we have sinned in this and that, therefore we must become consistently wicked all through, and admire, forsooth! our own miserable consistency, which has been established at the price of all that is good in us. Let us believe in God's love and God's grace, and Christ's power to cast out the vile, clinging, evil self; let us again and again protest to God that it is not

Digitized by Google

our true self that sins, and ask Him to help us, not to try to strike a balance about ourselves, but to be as brave about our repentance and yet as hopeful as David was, and also as true to the facts about ourselves as he who wrote David's history.

It is not as French sentimentalism and a certain school of English fiction-writers teach us, that good and evil can be harmonized—they cannot be; our ideas of right and wrong are a reflection from God's Nature. To confound moral distinctions, to call light darkness and bitter sweet, is to trifle with God and with our own sense of truth. There are no lack of writers around us who do thus set themselves to confuse our notions, to encircle all the sins of the Decalogue with a halo of falsest glory, to try to obliterate moral distinctions in a bathos of gush, to make vice lovely, to gloze over sin. This the sacred writer does not do in David's case; hence the lastingness of the lessons he teaches us. The wholesomeness of his treatment is that he simply states the case and leaves its proper work to the conscience, and in this very way helps us. He does not weakly endeavour to balance, nor does he try to make evil good; he leaves it, and he teaches us thereby a deep lesson, which we can never study too carefully. And let us recognize the fact that at least one English writer, and he conspicuously the greatest, does the same. There is

Digitized by Google

real art as well as high morality in Shakespeare's pictures of men for that reason; he paints men and women with their virtues and their faults, their mixed characters, but he does not let you forget that Macbeth is selfish, though he is brave, or that Iago is wicked, though he is clever. Would that we read him more, if we could thus learn to adopt his methods and to study our fellows as intelligently as he did. It is one thing to confound moral distinctions, it is quite another to recognize that wheat and tares are to be found even in one personality, and that to try to gather the one by hasty wholesale condemnation may be to root up the other also.

Lastly, observe that for simple people, for those who approach the subject rather with the heart than reason, David's story has always a fascination even exceeding St. Paul's. Men prize and love his story; they find him one with themselves in the struggles of their own humbler life. They see from the Psalms to what he could soar, and they see how once he fell; they know their own need of purification, and confess their sins, and so trust that God will receive and bless them; they know that David's story opens to them possibilities and hopes of higher and better lives. When a stupid unbelief asks about David, "Is this the man after God's own heart?" it does not touch these simple souls. They feel that without David's

Digitized by Google

inconsistencies his life would be unlike theirs, and his story would be no help to them. They know that sometimes they yield themselves to God and grow thereby, and again yield to sin and become the servants of evil, and they groan over their inconsistencies. But David's life, told as simply as it is, assures them that God still loves them, and they hold to Him still. Out of the deep they cry unto God, "Against Thee only have I sinned." They have tried wearily and painfully to explain things, to balance their life, and they have had to give it up, sick at heart and unsatisfied; there is too much inconsistency about it, too much that they cannot explain. But God is their helper, the same God who led David through his sin to a more perfect obedience, and in the contemplation and adoration of God they find at last deliverance from the burden of self, and the longed-for joy of a conscious consistency.



Digitized by Google

## *LAST WORDS.*

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."—ST. JOHN iv. 24.

DAYS like to-day are days essentially of retrospect—days when we turn our eyes back and linger awhile before we say good-bye; we look back and treasure up our spiritual experiences and count up our mercies, and perhaps lament our failures to use our opportunities in this place, where we shall worship God no more.

On all such occasions there is a double current of feeling. No one can, on general grounds, lament the fact that this Church is to give way to a noble and beautiful building—no one who has any adequate conception, either of what is due to God or of the deep influence exerted on many by beauty of form as associated with His worship. There was a species of cant which used to be talked more than it is now—at least I think and hope so—which tried to assume

Digitized by Google

that the only thing Churches were for was to have sermons preached in them, and that neither their beauty nor ugliness, nor indeed any outward influences, had anything to do with raising and sustaining religious emotions; which used to argue that because you might ascend to the closest communion with God in a bare barn, therefore a bare barn was as good a Church as Westminster Abbey! But such ideas have had their day; they were too self-regarding to live long; they have given way to a temper of mind which perhaps expects too much from beautiful surroundings. The Renaissance left us a perpetual warning how a paganized spirit may find its home amid exquisite beauty of form. A nation may "kill the prophets," and yet build the most magnificent Churches as memorials of them.

We must never expect too much from surroundings. It will not make us all reverent and devout because we shall have a beautiful Church instead of an ugly one; it may help some of us to be more so, but it will force no one. The truth lies somewhere here. Beautiful surroundings in Churches are fitting, most of all, because of what is due to God. Moreover, they help us to see Him better; they show too in us the desire to honour Him, and so they exercise a reflexive influence; they help those who wish to make them helpful; they suggest the thought, "If these things, which

Digitized by Google

are so beautiful, lead to God, and yet are so unworthy of Him, what must God be?" And in this world, with its many influences which conspire to drag us down, we cannot afford to dispense with any suggestiveness of that kind. Wherever men try to dispense with it, the end is that God is forgotten and high thoughts about Him fade; life becomes sordid, or at least commonplace, with no touch of the other world about it. On the other hand, we cannot rely on beautiful surroundings; we may have the most elevating influences, all that art and music can do may be enlisted in the service of religion, and yet we may grovel if we choose to, we may live the most paganized and even animal lives. It comes, then, to this—a beautiful building in which to worship God is good in itself as honouring God, is good for us if we will let its influences work on us, and therefore we shall not shed tears to-day over the fact in itself that the mean and the ugly is to give way to the beautiful and the elevating; so far as this prospect is concerned, it is a day of joy.

And yet there is another side always. Whatever a thing may be, however poor and humble, it may be endeared to us by that great law of association. The instincts of memory and hope are the two great instincts that govern the life of man, and memory is the strongest as life advances and leaves less to hope

Digitized by Google

for in this world. I can well understand that this day may be a day of great sadness to some of the older members of the congregation. There have been those with whom they worshipped here, who have gone hence and are no more seen, and this place was the scene of their association with them in the deepest acts of their life—in the Communion of Christ's Body and Blood, in their touch with the eternal world; to them this day seems almost like a fresh parting, for here, it may be, they seemed to find a oneness with them unknown elsewhere—here where they are in the Presence of Him "in Whom all spirits live;" here before Him "Who is the God not of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto Him." For them the pain of old partings is renewed again to-day.

Unquestionably, as life advances we do not find ourselves affected by the simple beauty or ugliness of things; we find ourselves affected far more by the great law of association. Persons are more than places to us, and mean places that bring back noble persons vividly to us are more than splendid places that have no such associations. One quite understands the agony that all improvements bring in their train. The human heart is a more sensitive thing than artistic sensibility. There is that side of things, and, lest any one should think that I ignore it, I have stated it fully; but many of us cannot pretend to feel

Digitized by Google

it here, for the four short years that we have been here have brought us, perhaps, no such sad experiences. But I own that I felt it once when I went back to see the country Church in Shropshire where my father ministered when I was a little boy, and was shown the improvements as they called them. How I hated them! How I longed to see it all as it was for a moment! How imperious that demand is in us for the past to come back, for even what tells us vividly of the past to remain unchanged for us! How much less to us must always and for ever the new be—new acquaintances, new friends, new ties! how inferior to what has stood the test of time, to what has been consecrated by the touch of association!

There is this double side of things; the instincts of memory and of hope struggle within us for the mastery. Where is the reconciliation to be found? Where but in the thought of Him for whose sake Churches are built, that He and His children may meet in them in closest communion; where, but in the thought of God, Who, while He blesses and approves our every effort to advance, to make things better, to elevate man by material surroundings, to lead man up to Himself, is also and must be, because He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," "our Refuge from one generation to another," the holder together of past, present, and future; He Who really preserves for us all that is

Digitized by Google

precious and blessed in the past, and is now weaving out of it a greater and more blessed future. He is ever "making all things new;" not novel, not strange, but fresh, with the dew of heaven upon them. He will bring back to us whatever there is treasured up in our experience that is worth preserving—old scenes, old faces, old loves, old regards, old reverences; He will bathe them with the freshness of the second birth, and in Him and in His realized Presence we shall find all that has gone from us. The past may seem to hold the best we can know, but it cannot keep them—

> "Thou unrelenting past,
> Strong are thy barriers round thy dark domain,
> And fetters sure and fast
> Hold all that enter thine enthralling reign.
> Thou hast my better years,
> Thou hast my earlier friends, the good, the kind,
> Yielded to thee with tears,
> The venerable form, th' exalted mind;
> There for a space they are.
> Yet thou shalt yield thy treasures up at last;
> Thy gates shall yet give way,
> Thy bolts shall fail, inexorable past."

It is in the thought of God Who changes not that we get the connecting link between that energy of improvement which we know is implanted by Him and meant to be used, and that love of what is connected with us by the strongest ties of association. God, Who is and loves, understands,

Digitized by Google

how we cling to the old that is passing away, and through Him even the very sea shall give up her dead. Without the thought of the living God, of Him Who is, we can easily become merely morbid, dwelling like the demoniac "amid the tombs," instead of deepening our faith in Him Who ever is, and Who while He is keeping our treasures which seem to have gone from us, is making them new. The more we see God, the more conscious we are of Him, the less disposed we are to dwell morbidly in the past. It is the want of realization of His ever-present Energy, of the fact that all that seems to be dead lives unto Him, that leaves us depressed at changes, with no heart to help the new order. And the one great means of preserving and deepening our consciousness of God is worship. That is the real and lasting interest of this day. It is a day which ends our worship here, and which marks a stage towards improved opportunities of worship. And worship is the one great means of realizing God as He is, God Who holds together the past and the future. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Worship is what the Father seeks; the worship "in spirit and in truth," *i.e.* in the depths of man's being, and with that reality about it which makes it pervade his whole being, is what He longs for. Worship in

Digitized by Google

the highest sense is a vision of God, a vision of Him which entrances the soul and causes it to be spell-bound, a vision of what He is in Himself.

That is why our Lord insists on the twofold fact that God is a Spirit, and then that worshippers must worship Him in spirit, because God can be best approached by that part of man which is most alive to Himself; spirit must touch spirit. And because worship is a vision of God, it must raise men above anything else. Men may pray and read their Bible at home, but they cannot worship perfectly. In private prayer man holds communion with God, and in that communion specific petition has its own though a subordinate place, but in worship man sees God as He is. This is the real reason why we grow attached to Churches, whatever they are like, because they are the scenes of those thrills of spiritual realization, which are the deepest things in the world. Let me explain what I mean by worship. For worship there are two factors, so to speak—firstly, the state of mind; secondly, the outward offering. Now, worship as a state of mind is the highest of all states, because it is the least self-regarding. There are many states of mind which for a time go out of self, but they only go out of it that they may bring back something to it. Any study in which you are absorbed, or music to which you are listening takes

Digitized by Google

you out of yourself for a time, but it brings something back to you, and the idea that underlies your absorption is that it will bring you something back. But worship in its highest idea is wholly regardless of consequences; it sees God as He is and adores. It is the worthiness of God which is the primary thought in worship; not "What will God do for me?" but "What is He in Himself?" And so the essence of worship as a state of mind is absorption in that which is worthy of it, that is, in God; there is no thought of getting for self in it—for once man is really unselfish when he worships.

Now, the offering public worship is the one means of expressing the worshipping state of mind. Of course, that state of mind may be arrived at elsewhere, but it has a special and peculiar meaning when it is arrived at in common with others. The association with others before God actualizes this state of mind. We see in others the brethren, and to see the brethren is to realize the Presence of the Father. But to rise to the vision of God in actual worship requires more than the presence of others or fitting buildings; it requires personal preparation. "As for me, I will come into Thy house," says David: "in the multitude of Thy mercies and in Thy fear will I worship towards Thy holy Temple." Like David, we should think beforehand of the mercy and

Digitized by Google

goodness of our Father, quicken our love of His goodness, that reverence may spread over us. One of the best reasons for coming to Holy Communion at an early service on Sunday is that we avoid by that means that which may distract us. Those who from sloth neglect such a distinct privilege as early Communion know not what they lose. You may concentrate your forces after dissipation, but it is much less likely that you will do so; and the Holy Communion, the highest act of worship, where we touch Christ most closely, when "we dwell in Him, and He in us," demands our best energies, our first freshness. Our willingness to give ourselves trouble in going to it is the measure of our faith. This is not a matter of mere observance, else I would not press it on you; it has an intensely deep moral and spiritual significance. Human nature does not love trouble, but unquestionably, here as elsewhere, the saying is fulfilled, "They that seek Me early shall find Me." And then, in coming to later services we should try to avoid distracting subjects on the road to church; above all, we should come early and pray each for ourselves and for others when we kneel down, that we may see God—it is the best prayer of all—that we may get a sight of God to strengthen, to reassure, and enkindle us. We know not what we lose by hurrying in at the last moment, and failing to

Digitized by Google

secure a few quiet moments before service. But it is in praise that we have the best opportunity of rising to the worshipping state of mind, and the highest expressions of it are in the "Te Deum" and "Gloria in Excelsis." The "Te Deum" opens with expression after expression of rapture at the thought of God being what He is; the "Gloria in Excelsis" rises to the highest pitch of fervour. "We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory," *i.e.* for being what Thou art, what Thou wouldst have been had neither man nor angel been created! No better forms of praise, no better training for public worship, can be found than by using them in our private prayers; they breathe a far truer spirit than the poor wretched thin subjectiveness that characterizes too many of our popular hymns.

Then in Holy Communion, when all is still, and the greatest gift is about to become ours, what an opportunity is before us! not to sit and stare before us, but to bow our heads before a mystery too deep for definition. He dwelleth in me, and I in Him, that my sinful body may be made clean by His Body, that my soul may be washed through His Precious Blood. Surely worship at such moments is verily and indeed a sight of God. But it needs effort to secure this. You cannot drop gracefully into your

Digitized by Google

seat in Church as if you were attending a theatre or a concert, and expect to get a grand sight of God; still less can you expect it if you come in a selfish spirit, *e.g.* let other people stand that you may sit more comfortably. You must climb if you want the mountain air, and only those who concentrate their powers and use them become aware that "the ground is holy and the place dreadful," and that, however mean is the outward building, "this is none other but the house of God," "this is the gate of heaven," where man may see God.

Yet this is what we would attain to here, and in that worthier building which, if God spares us, we may meet together again in, on this spot, some eighteen months hence. This is the ideal which we must meantime try to reach or to perfect. We must see God. Spirit must meet with spirit if we are to believe in Him. This ideal of worship alone will save us from blank unbelief, or from that commonplace belief in God which makes life so sterile and so inadequate.

And to-day there is one prayer we must surely say all of us before we go. God forgive us for our past failures of worship here, for not having cared enough and thought enough about Him. God forgive us for our neglected opportunities, our wasted moments here. God forgive us all who have led your

Digitized by Google

praises and prayers here, for all our omissions and neglect. God help you and us alike to see Him more clearly in other scenes; to see Him and to know His Presence, and to gain the greatest of all blessings—a sight of Him.

And so our worship will become more and more a training for the time when our eyes shall really see —see at last face to face the sight which is indescribable, "the King in His Beauty."

THE END.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED, LONDON AND BECCLES.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google